

STACY: CHANGING OUR VIEW OF WOMEN'S WRESTLING?

INSIDE Wrestling

**TRIPLE-H vs.
STONE-COLD**

DUDLEYS vs. OUTSIDERS

McMAHON vs. BISCHOFF

ROCK vs. ANGLE

RVD vs. BENOIT

FUDD ALERT!

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ON 2002'S
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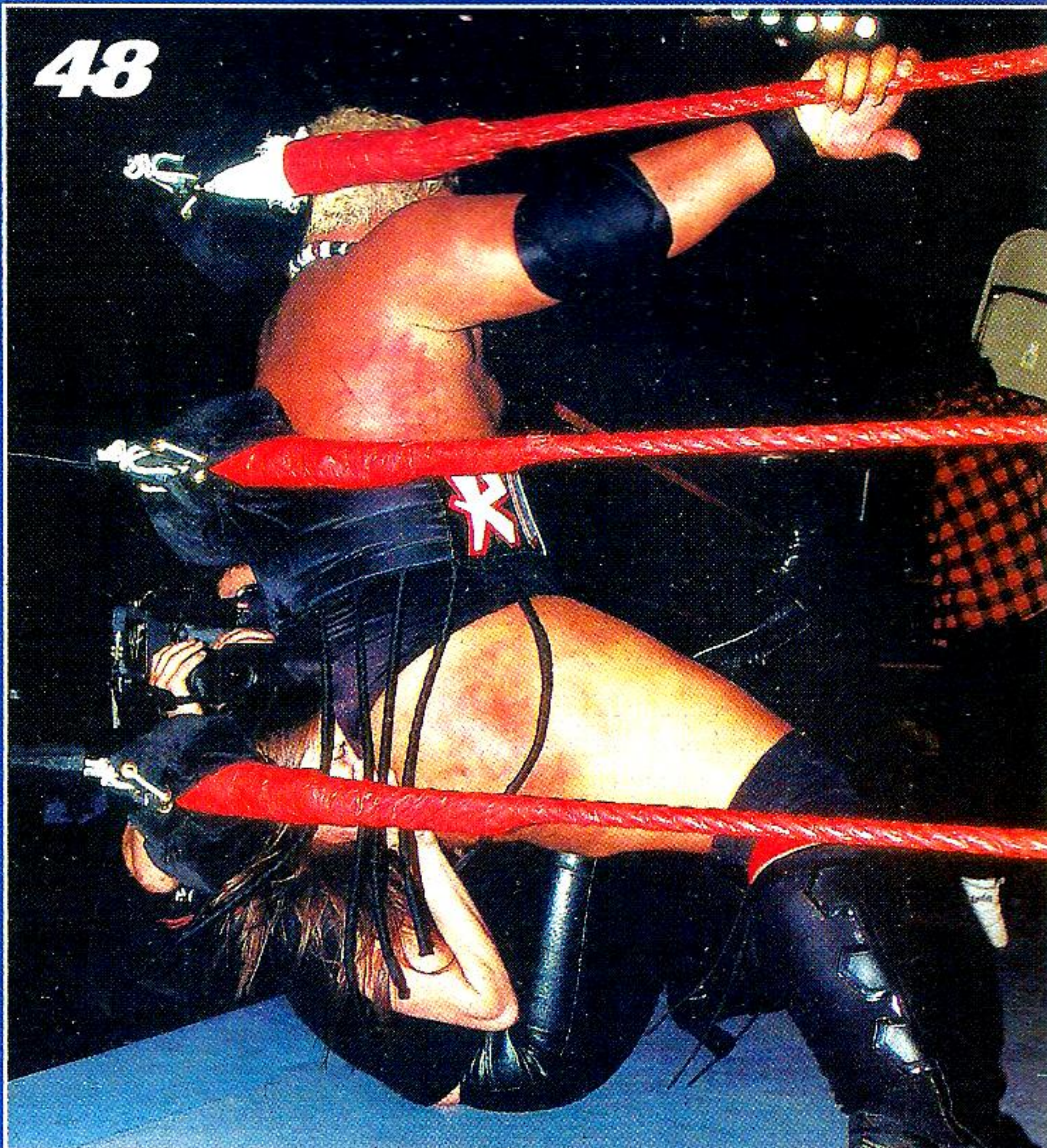
inside wrestling

THE MAGAZINE THAT RIPS THE LID OFF PRO WRESTLING

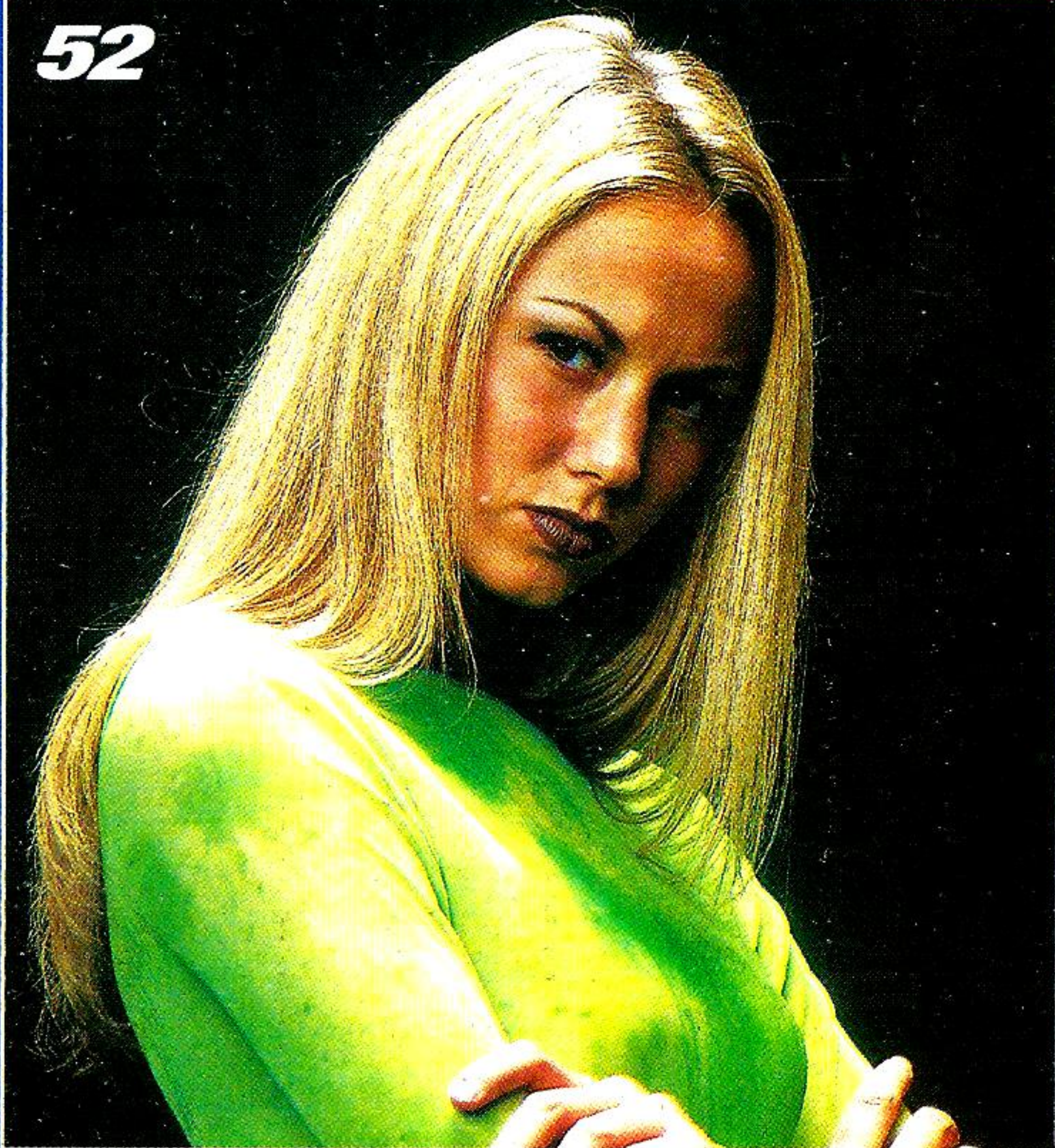
DEPARTMENTS

- 4 SINCERELY YOURS
- 6 REPORTER'S NOTEBOOK by Stu Saks
- 8 NAMES MAKIN' NEWS by Harry Burkett
- 14 DATA SHEET: ROB VAN DAM
- 15 DATA SHEET: RUSS & CHARLIE HAAS
- 16 ON THE ROAD with Dave Lenker
- 18 BEHIND THE DRESSING ROOM DOOR with Frank Krewda
- 20 THE INSIDER by Brandi Mankiewicz
- 22 ON ASSIGNMENT by Liz Hunter
- 24 CAPSULE PROFILE #306: SCOTT STEINER
- 26 WHATEVER HAPPENED TO by Scott Teal
- 28 MATT BROCK'S PLAIN SPEAKING
- 66 EDITORS' ROUNDTABLE
- 70 DATA SHEET: PERRY SATURN
- 71 DATA SHEET: JAYSON REIGN
- 72 WRESTLING TIMELINE: 1997
- 88 OFFICIAL WRESTLING RATINGS
- 89 INSIDE WRESTLING ROLL CALL OF CHAMPIONS
- 90 BLAST FROM THE PAST

48



52



FEATURES

- 33** NOW WE'RE GOING TO SCHOOL!
OUR 2001 REPORT CARDS FOR THE STARS
It's the time of year that's dreaded by everyone. Okay, not everyone, but definitely those who failed to meet expectations. You'll be surprised by some of the grades for the 10 men we evaluated
- 48** THE RETURN OF RIKISHI
AND HIS 800-POUND SECRET WEAPON!
That "weapon" would be Ekmo and Kimo, The Island Boys
- 52** STACY KEIBLER:
"I'LL CHANGE THE WAY PEOPLE LOOK AT
WOMEN'S WRESTLING FOREVER"
"The Duchess Of Dudleyville" has her say in "Hotseat"
- 56** FEUD ALERT!
THE LOWDOWN ON 2002's HOTTEST SHOWDOWNS!
Some major scores will have to be settled in 2002. We'll tell you why certain superstars will be gunning for each other—and what to expect from these explosive rivalries
- 62** SHANE HELMS: TRAPPED IN THE EYE OF THE HURRICANE
Is he buried too deep in this goofy character?

COVER PHOTOS:

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sincerely yours

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DEAD AGAIN

I am a huge fan of the WWF, but I must say that I don't like what has become of The Undertaker. Don't get me wrong, I still think he is a kick-ass wrestler, but come on, his entrance music is Limp Bizkit. And he comes down riding a Harley! What happened to "The Prince Of Darkness"? I

think we need to bring him back. It also kind of takes away from how menacing Kane can really be when he comes to the ring to "Rollin'" along with The Undertaker. I'm sure a lot of fans would like to see "The Prince Of Darkness" re-emerge.

FRANK PALFALVI

Detroit, MI



A lot of people miss the "Prince Of Darkness" version of The Undertaker. Reader Frank Palfalvi is hoping to see him return—and "The American Badass" disappear.

DISSING THE BISCH

I don't have the remedies for all that ails the WWF, but I know one thing that shouldn't be done: hiring Eric Bischoff. The WWF needs to find new ways of approaching wrestling and making itself cutting-edge cool again. It doesn't need to delve into the past looking for old formulas that worked. Even though they were never in the same arena or promotion together, Vince McMahon vs. Eric Bischoff is an old feud that's been hyped to death, if you ask me. It would have been hot about three years ago, but Bischoff is yesterday's news. And if Bischoff comes in, we're guaranteed to see more of the McMahons on *Raw* and *Smackdown*. What we need is a heck of a lot less.

WAYNE MONROE

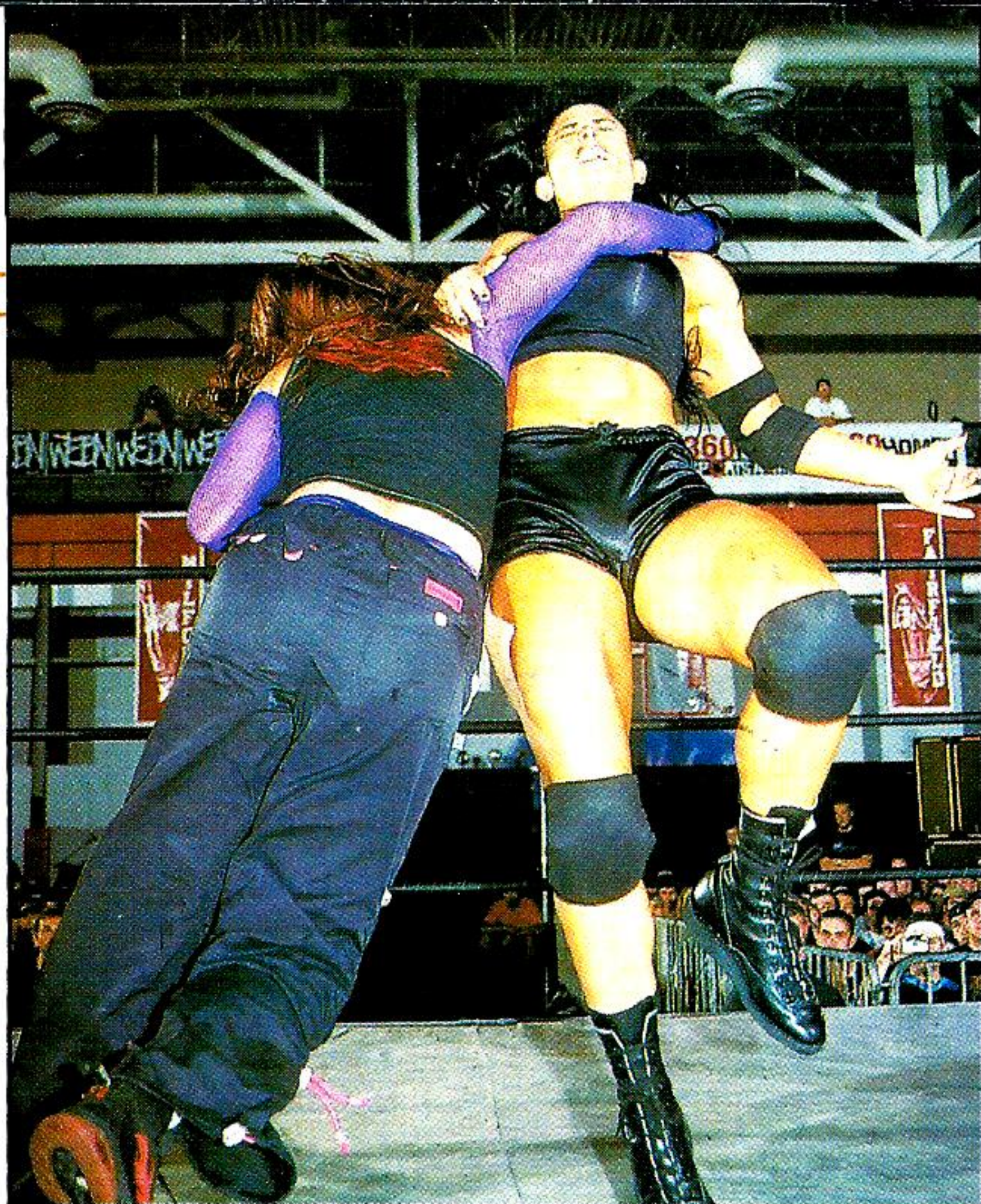
Southport, FL

LULL FOR LITA

Is it just me, or is Lita's popularity beginning to slip a little? I don't know if it's her fault or the WWF's, but she and The Hardy Boyz started to fade into the background a few months ago. I guess that split that you wrote in the February issue probably isn't going to happen might happen after all. I think a Hardy vs. Hardy feud with Lita caught in the middle would add a spark. Either that or bring in some more female wrestlers who can have good matches with Lita.

TINA BRIMSON

Woodland, WA



Maybe the addition of OVW's Queen Victoria to the WWF roster would help Lita, whom reader Tina Brimson believes has cooled off a bit lately.

BOLD REMARKS

After reading what Shawn Stasiak had to say in the "Hotseat" in your February issue, I had to write. Did he really think he could beat a legend like Ric Flair? He couldn't touch Flair on Flair's worst day. Even today, at age 52, Flair could wrestle circles around Stasiak.

As far as his father, Stan, goes, he was a nine-day wonder when he won the WWF title from Pedro Morales. Shawn Stasiak has a lot to learn before he'll even be mentioned in the same breath as Flair, who just happens to be the best damn wrestler who ever lived. Also, does Stasiak really think that Steve Austin gives a rat's ass about him? *Ha!* "Stone-Cold" only cares about one person: himself.

TONY McLAUGHLIN
Lafayette, IN

INDY FEVER

I wish INSIDE WRESTLING could do more on All Pro Wrestling here in California. It doesn't get a lot of publicity, but some of the best matches I've seen over the last two years have been in APW rings. The "King Of The Indies" tournament APW put on in October was fantas-

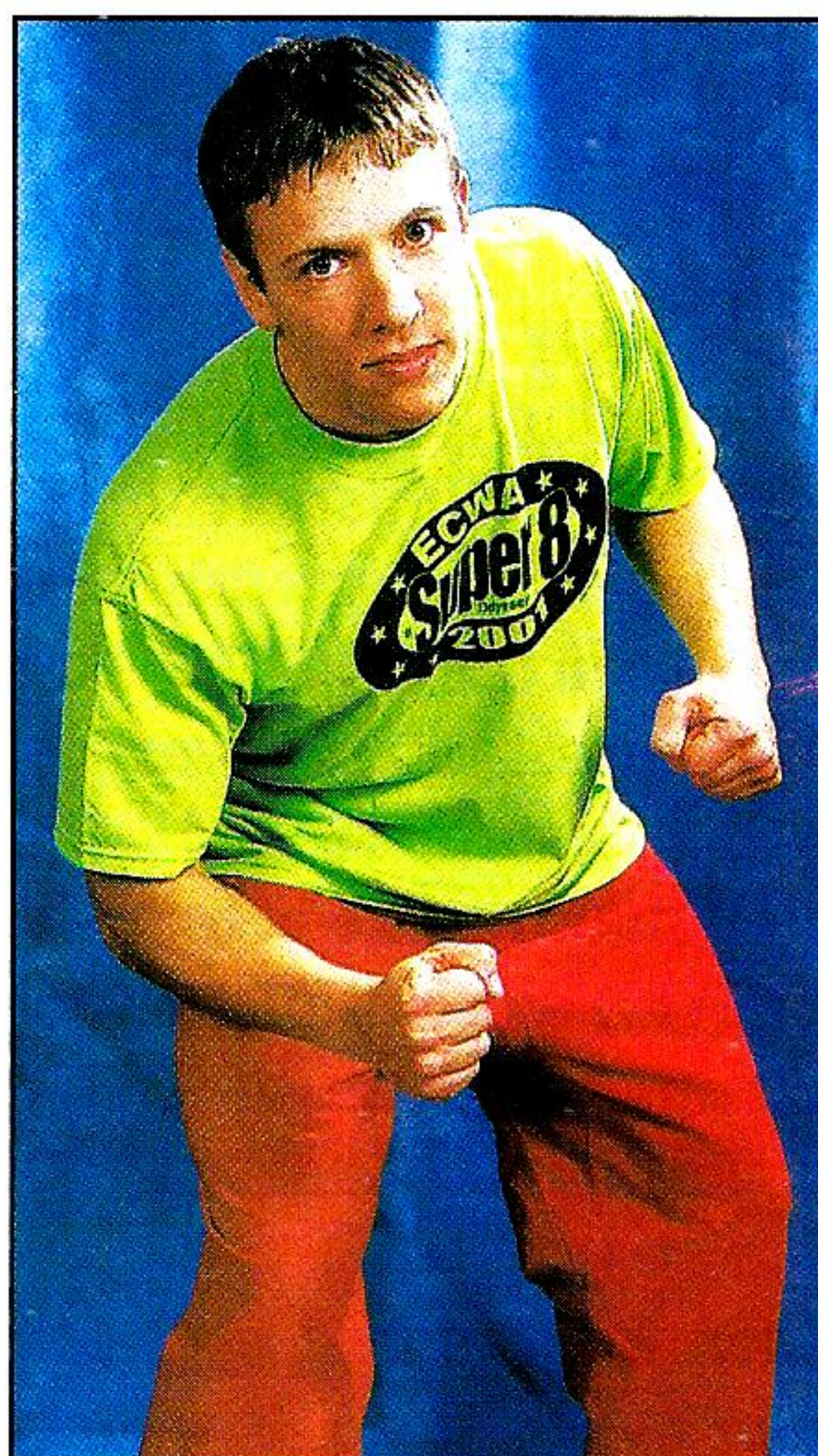
tic. You ought to do stories on guys like A.J. Styles and American Dragon. The final match of this year's tournament—Dragon vs. Low-Ki—was as good as any WWF match in at least two or three years, and I order and watch all the WWF pay-per-views. Dragon was a deserving winner of the tournament.

STEVE OREFIELD
Forbestown, CA

HE HAS A FAN!

So Dallas Page isn't stalking The Undertaker's wife anymore, he's not bragging about what an

(Continued on page 82)



American Dragon had plenty to smile about after winning APW's "King Of The Indies" tournament in California in October. Steve Orefield is raving about the match Dragon had with Low-Ki at that event.

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reporter's notebook

By Stu Saks

His horizontal and vertical smiles couldn't be wider as Vince McMahon galloped around the ring, a cowboy hat covering his head and nothing covering his butt.

No doubt, as the WWF moved into the second week of its post-Alliance era, Big Mac has a right to feel a bit giddy. With Jerry Lawler back at the mike, Ric Flair in the fold, the Alliance laid to rest, and positive reviews flowing in from even the most cynical among the media, the WWF had clearly turned a creative corner.

And just as important to Vince McMahon (the man) as opposed to Mr. McMahon (the character), he was beginning to distance himself from November 8. On that gloomy Thursday, McMahon won a pinfall over his conscience and made the excruciating decision to lay off 39 employees, a full nine percent of his front office staff, and accept the resignation of WWFE President and Chief Operating Officer Stuart Snyder. For those directly involved, it was obviously a devastating and life-changing event, but even for those of us who are only indirectly involved, it marked a stunning reversal of fortune for a company that not too long ago was exploring the possibility of moving out of Titan Tower into a building that could better accommodate a burgeoning NYSE corporation.

The year 2001 hit the U.S. economy like a Triple-H sledgehammer. And the WWF, which had enjoyed a years-long growth mode, could not escape unharmed. The WWF, arguably overstaffed in anticipation of continued expansion, trimmed \$9-million annually in payroll and expenses with the purge. The oh-so-corporately correct day-after press release attributed to CEO Linda McMahon the notion that the "restructuring" was "an important step toward ensuring WWFE's competitive advantage as it pursues growth opportunities".

I can't fault the company for making the cuts. Not only is the bottom line to be considered, but so too is the WWFE stock. Unless such cuts are made in a desperate attempt to ward off bankruptcy (which the WWF certainly is not), investors look favorably on a company that admits there is fat on the bone and is then bold enough to trim it.

Still, as the holiday season approached and prospects for new work within this industry were bleaker than ever before, it was a sad time for the 39 who lost their jobs. It's seems so weird that "Mr. McMahon" is having such a tough time getting highly paid wrestlers to kiss his butt when these unemployed folks would probably be glad to do it in exchange for what they had before November 8.

names makin' news

By Harry Burkett

RIC FLAIR RETURNED to the WWF after an eight-year absence on November 19, only one day after Survivor Series. It was yet another great comeback for the "Nature Boy," as a hometown crowd in Charlotte, North Carolina, welcomed the news that Flair was a new co-owner of the WWF, sharing equal power with Vince McMahon.

The former NWA, WCW, and WWF world champion signed a three-year contract with WWFE. According to the *Charlotte Observer*, Flair's attorneys worked with WWFE

attorneys with a fever intensity to extricate him from his AOL Time Warner deal, which had been signed in February 2000. In fact, coming to terms on a WWFE contract was relatively easy. Breaking the Time Warner contract was another matter entirely.

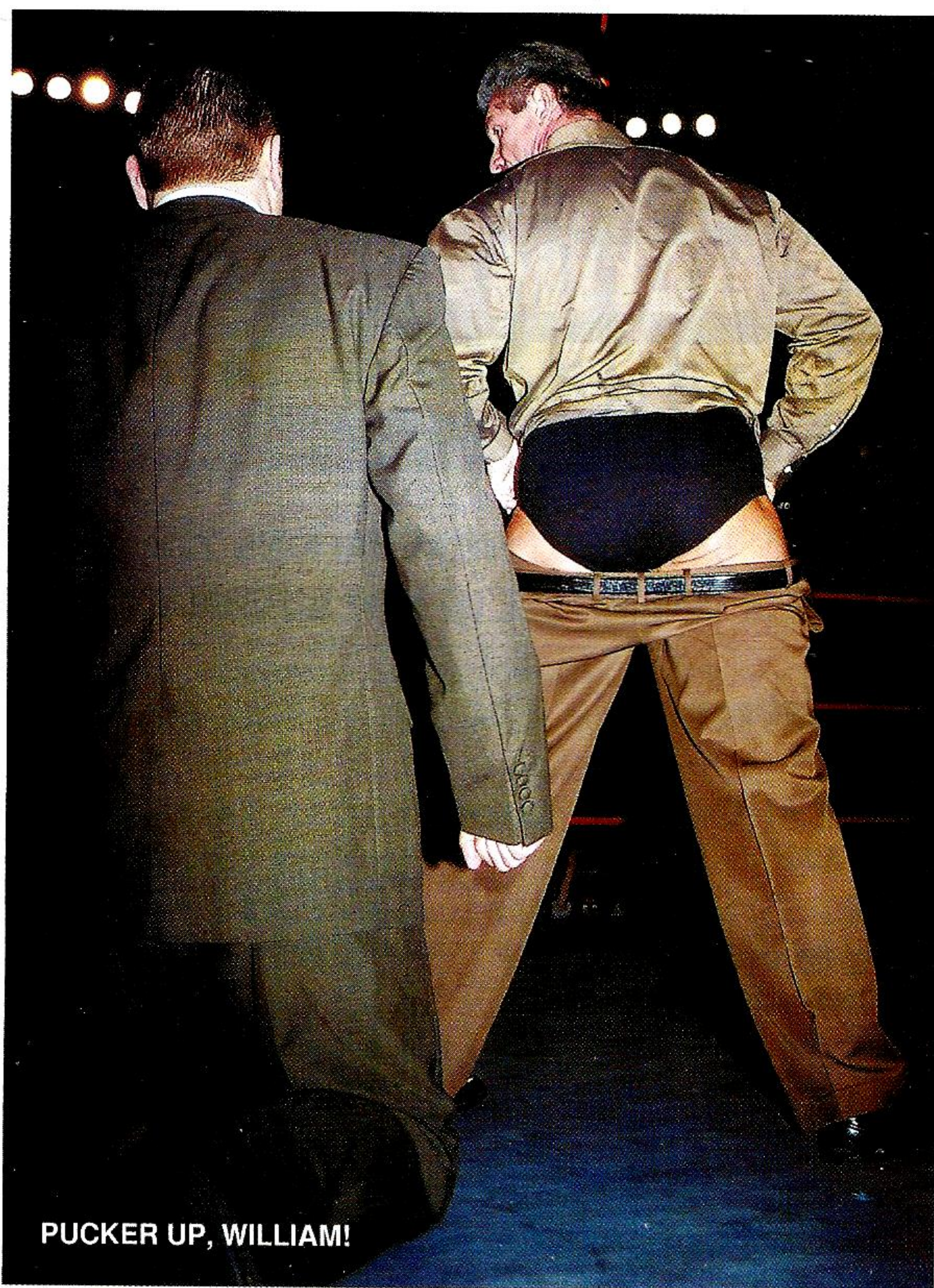
"I actually got a little emotional," Flair said of his appearance in an interview with the *Observer*. "I had to get a grip. I love the fans. I always have. And that was one of the top three or four moments in my career."

Flair's appearance indicated a radical change in direction

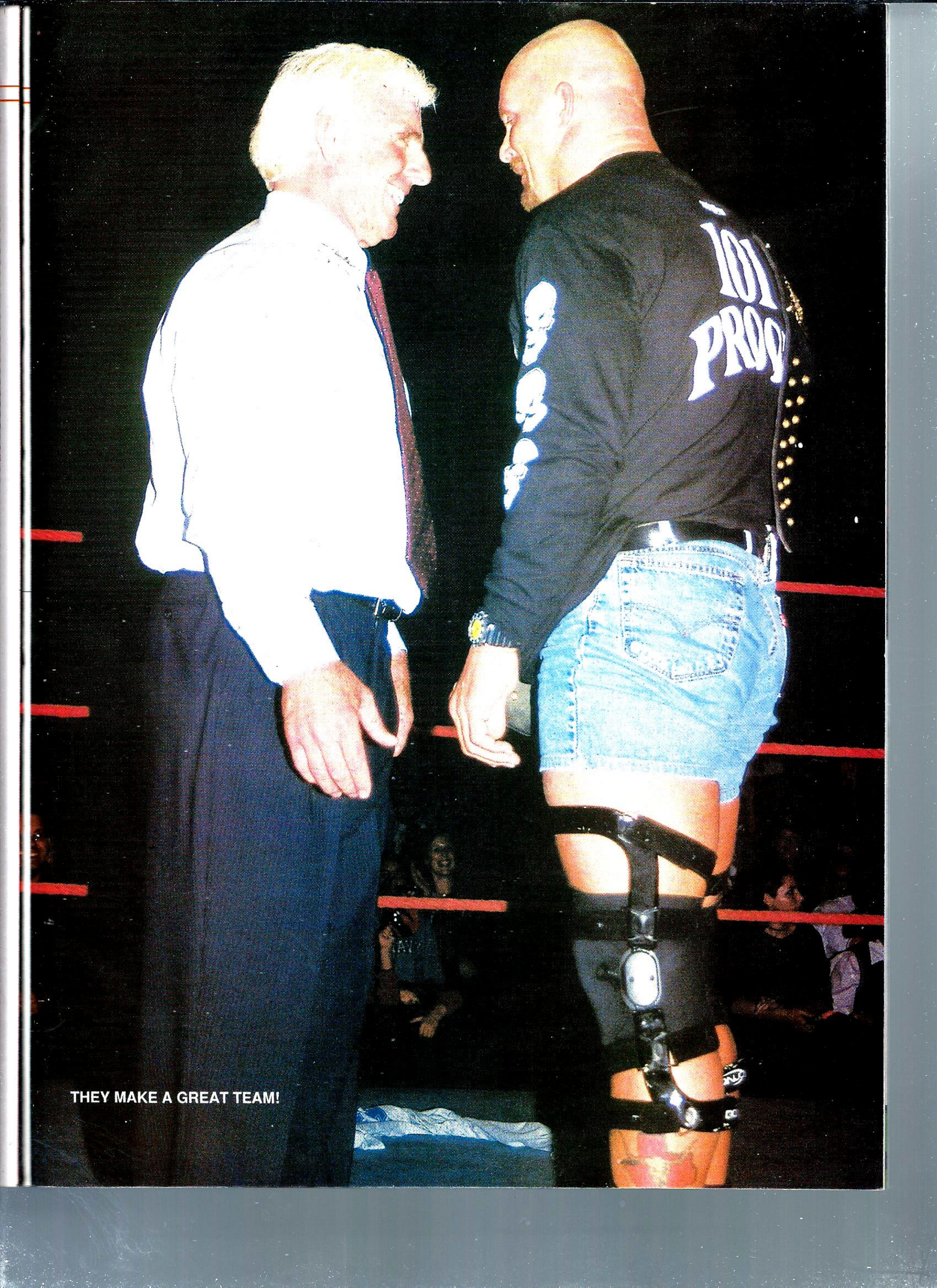
for the WWF, with the Survivor Series marking a definitive end to the often-convoluted, usually disappointing WWF-Alliance feud. First, the WWF had failed to make WCW a separate entity and opted for a short-term invasion pitting WCW against the WWF. But with only mid-carders and lower-tier wrestlers representing WCW, the decision was made to bring ECW into the mix. Still, there was no way around the Alliance's minor-league feel, and it never seemed to be a serious threat to the WWF.

All of that could change in January. Kevin Nash's contract with AOL Time Warner will expire on January 1. Scott Hall has indicated an interest in re-forming the New World Order, or at least The Outsiders, with Nash. Scott Steiner's leg and back injuries should be almost mended by early-2002, and there's always the possibility of McMahon dropping his grudge and allowing Jeff Jarrett to return. Even a comeback by Hulk Hogan, who left the WWF eight years ago, could happen around WrestleMania X-8. The return of such big-name talent, combined with the return of injured WWF stars Triple-H and Chris Benoit, should make fans feel confident that exciting times are ahead.

The WWF's change in direction does have its critics, however. Ric Flair's debut on *Raw*, along with Jerry Lawler replacing Paul Heyman at the announcers' table, was very promising. Vince McMahon had expressed his desire to "get back to what works," and obviously, in McMahon's mind at least, that includes the risqué content that helped the WWF so much four years

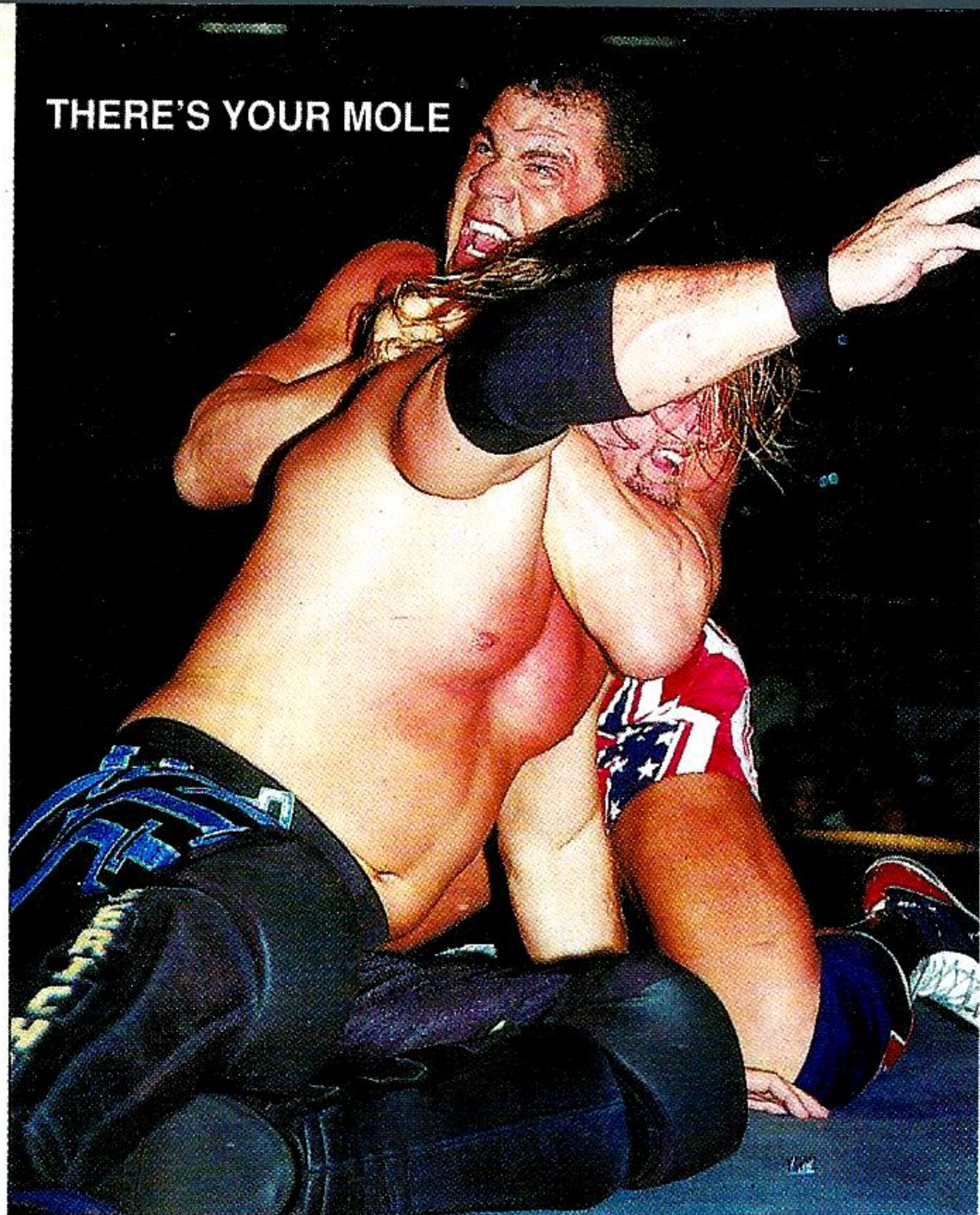


PUCKER UP, WILLIAM!



THEY MAKE A GREAT TEAM!

THERE'S YOUR MOLE



ago. McMahon forcing William Regal to kiss his ass provided some naughty, yet lighthearted fare on November 19.

One week later, the ass-kissing seemed to be taken to the extreme with McMahon trying to get Steve Austin to commit the same act and, with surprise help from The Undertaker, forcing Jim Ross to do it. The fact that McMahon's pants were drooping below his behind during the entire over-run made it plain that a potentially fun segment had become unnecessarily disturbing.

Lower ratings and a desire to finally split into two companies in early-2002 spawned the dramatic shift in storyline direction. CEO Linda McMahon addressed these issues in a media conference call dealing with WWF's second-quarter SEC financial filing. "Even though [our television ratings] are still at levels others would be thrilled to attain, they are below our [expectations]. We feel our ratings slipped because our weekly storylines were not as compelling."

Despite the problems the WCW acquisition has brought, Vince McMahon remains committed to a separate company—with the other entity getting *Raw* or *Smackdown*—in order to give viewers a reason to watch both programs every single week. With storylines continuing from *Raw* to *Smackdown* and *Smackdown* to *Raw*, the WWF has become can-miss TV for some fans. McMahon wants to turn that once-a-week viewing into twice-a-week viewing.

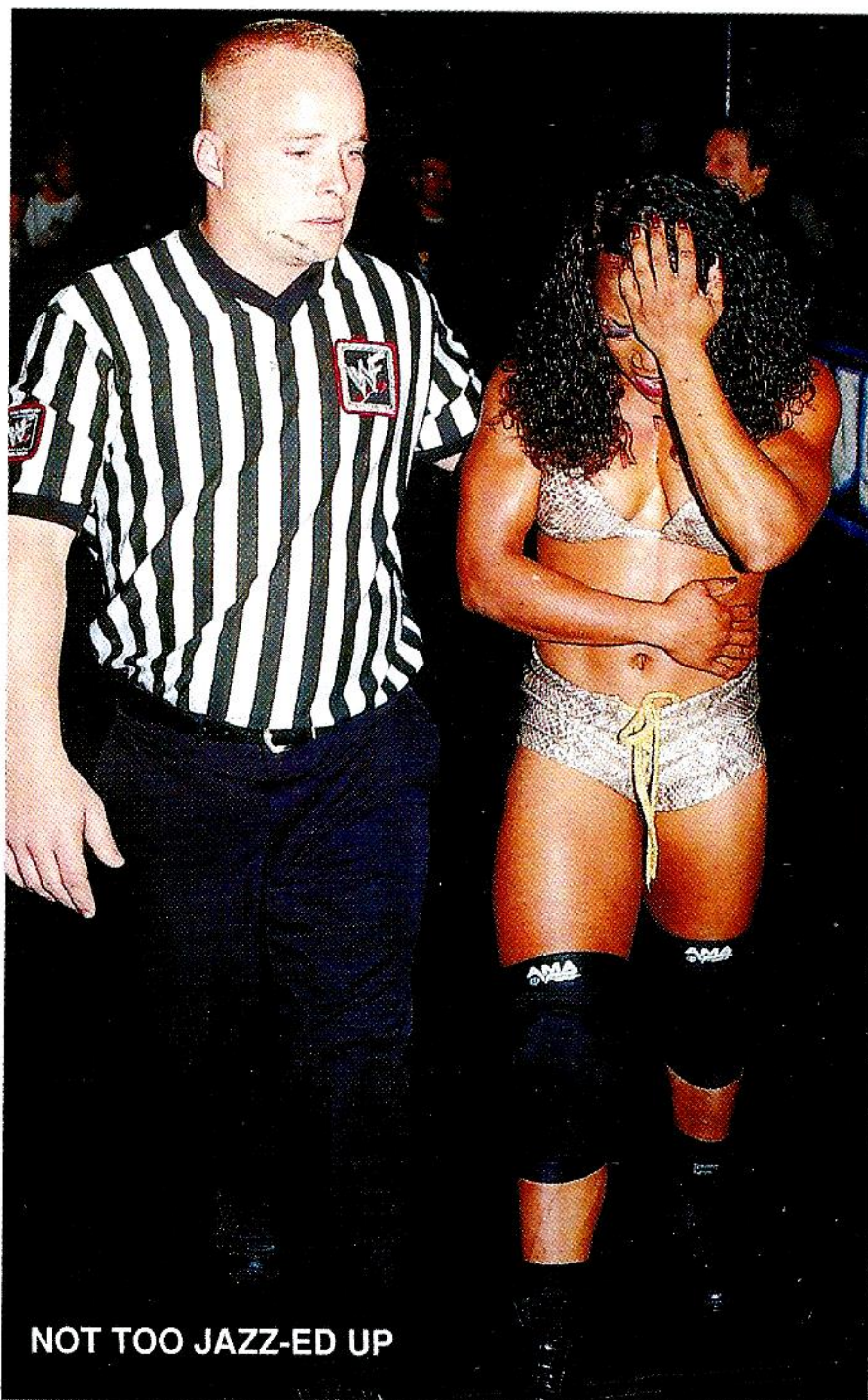
Linda admitted there had been some "creative confusion" as of late. "We have that organized now. Everything is back under the WWF banner. But if you watch the next two weeks, the storylines and [separate] brand development will become clearer."

Despite the confusion, Survivor Series 2001 was a strong pay-per-view. This year, the pay-per-view featured a traditional Survivor Series-style match in the main event,

with the fate of the WWF and the Alliance in the balance. WCW World champion The Rock, Chris Jericho, The Undertaker, Kane, and The Big Show represented the WWF, while WWF World champion Steve Austin, Kurt Angle, Booker T, Rob Van Dam, and Shane McMahon represented the Alliance. The fact that the WCW champion was aligned with the WWF and the WWF champion was with the Alliance, and that Booker T and Rob Van Dam were the only original WCW and ECW stars on the Alliance, demonstrated the "creative confusion" Linda was talking about.

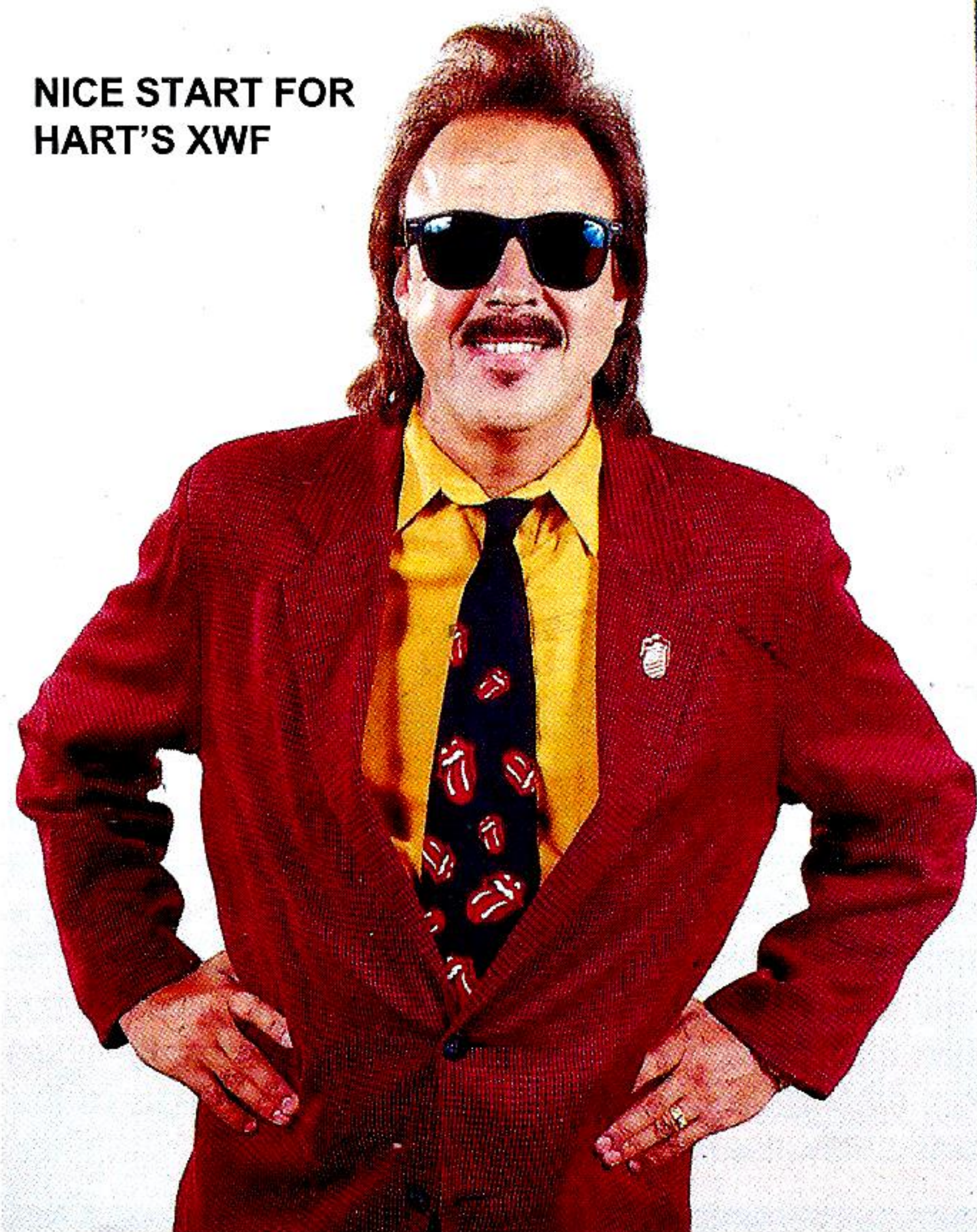
It took a massive assault by various Alliance members, punctuated by Shane McMahon's flying elbowsmash from the top rope, to eliminate The Big Show. The Rock interrupted Shane's celebration with repeated blows and tagged in Kane, who delivered a choke-slam. Chris Jericho pinned the WCW owner with a lionsault.

Later in the match, The Rock eliminated Booker T, Jericho pinned Van Dam, Rock forced Angle to tap out to the sharpshooter, and Austin pinned Jericho, leaving only Austin and Rock. It was another intense confrontation between the WWF's two top stars, but it was Angle—who had been the mole in the Alliance—who nailed "Stone-Cold" with the WWF World title belt, enabling The Rock to score the pinfall and save the WWF.



NOT TOO JAZZ-ED UP

NICE START FOR HART'S XWF



Also of note at the Survivor Series, former ECW star Jazz was revealed as the mystery participant in the six-way match for the vacant women's championship. This was not an elimination-style bout, however, as the first woman to score a pinfall would be awarded the title. With the endurance factor negated, Jazz lost her biggest advantage over the other women, and it was Trish Stratus who caught Ivory with a bulldog and captured her first championship.

In other matches, Test won an "immunity" battle royal to ensure his spot in the WWF for a full year ... The two world tag team championships were unified when WWF champs The Dudley Boyz beat WCW champs The Hardy Boyz ... U.S. champion Edge defeated Test for the Intercontinental title. The U.S. title was eliminated in light of the WWF's main-event victory ... William Regal beat former krumpet-fetching boy Tajiri ... European champion Christian beat former titleholder Al Snow.

While this wasn't considered a major factor in the McMahons' decision-making, Vince and Linda had to give some thought to the upstart Xtreme Wrestling Federation that began television tapings at Universal Studios in Orlando. This is the long-awaited Hulk Hogan-Jimmy Hart venture, although the "Hulkster" is not the owner and might not be involved long-term. The XWF taped 10 shows on November 13 and 14.

The XWF featured nearly every major name not signed to a WWFE contract, and seemed to deliver on the empty promises made by Main Event Championship Wrestling a few months ago. This sampling of events highlights the XWF's potential if it is successful in obtaining a cable contract. A syndication deal is more likely, but that would make the promotion's future much less certain.

Tony Schiavone and Jerry Lawler were the announcers

NEWS ANALYSIS

RETURN OF THE NATURE BOY. Just like WCW, why is it that the WWF recruited Ric Flair only when it experienced lower ratings? Flair saved the day on *Raw* on November 19, just as he had done on *Nitro* on numerous occasions. One week later, Flair's time on *Raw* had decreased to less than five minutes. Vince McMahon's time, and the never-ending ass-kissing, consumed nearly a half-hour of the program. I hope this isn't a sign of things to come.

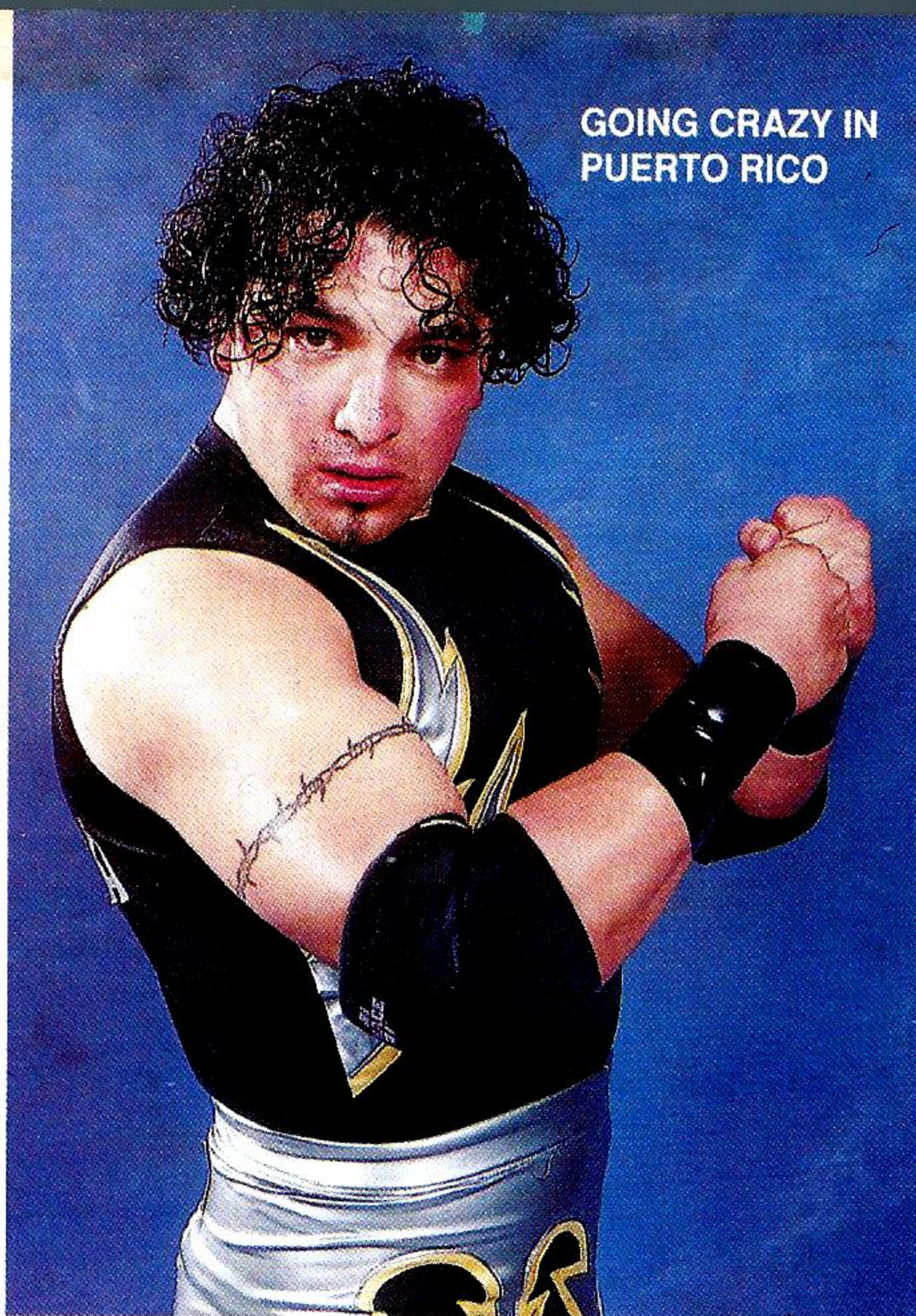
KISS IT GOODBYE. Vince McMahon doesn't know any middle ground. From turning WWF stars into complete cartoon caricatures in the 1980s, to having DX take a whiz on The Undertaker's motorcycle in '98, he always goes to the extremes. It seems, at least evidenced by the ass-kissing of November 26, that he wants to light up the WWF with a bit more attitude. Why is he never satisfied with character depth and good storytelling? With Steve Austin, The Rock, and Ric Flair, there's no need to show bare bottom on TV.

AN XWF REVOLUTION? For a fledgling "independent" promotion, the XWF has a roster depth greater than Turner's WCW in its later months. Sure, the promotion is top-heavy with veteran talent, but if used properly, it could elevate the Kid Kashes and Jimmy Snuka Jrs. of the XWF. Promotions with Hulk Hogan and Jimmy Hart don't have a good track record in this regard, but let's give this a chance.

BRUISER BRODY WOULD BE PROUD. "The Wildman From Albuquerque" met his untimely demise in a Puerto Rico shower stall, but Brody and the island territory are forever intertwined, as proven by the spectacular memorial show in his honor. Young stars such as Nuevo Gran Apolo, Glamour Boy Shane, and Ricky Banderas have tremendous potential, especially with veterans like Dutch Mantel and Savio Vega on the scene.

REST IN PEACE, MRS. HART. Not since Doris Von Erich has a family matriarch given so much to the business. Helen Hart gave more than handful of sons to pro wrestling, with Bret Hart becoming its top star for a time. In later years, she witnessed the death of youngest son Owen (in 1999) and had withstood terrible fighting within the family ever since. A woman who gave so much deserved better.

for the program, which may explain why the McMahons moved to secure "The King's" contract so quickly. Interestingly, the XWF resembled WCW more than the Alliance. Consider this lengthy list of ex-WCW stars who



GOING CRAZY IN
PUERTO RICO

appeared at the tapings: The Demon, Big Vito, The Harris Boys, Konnan, The Wall, Mr. Jones (Mike Jones/Shane/Vincent/Virgil), Norman Smiley, Rocco Rock, Johnny Grunge, Greg Valentine, Buff Bagwell, Horace Hogan, Chris Daniels, A.J. Styles, Prince Iaukea, The Nasty Boys, The LOD, Vampiro, Juventud Guerrera, Psicosis, and Johnny B. Badd. Bobby Heenan, Sonny Ono, and Gene Okerlund were there, too.

Josh Matthews from *Tough Enough*, Carlee Colon, The Shane Twins, Kevin Northcutt, Simon Diamond, Johnny Swinger, Dawn Marie, Kid Kash, and Marty Jannetty rounded out the eclectic roster. Roddy Piper and Rena Mero were in competing commissioner roles. Long-time fans savored the moment that Piper seemed to turn heel in a confrontation with Jimmy Snuka. As if there could be bigger news, Hulk Hogan made his in-ring comeback by defeating Curt Hennig.

News from the International Wrestling Association: The Bruiser Brody Memorial Show was held on November 24 in Bayamon, Puerto Rico. IWA champion Nuevo Gran Apolo defeated former champ Glamour Boy Shane in the best-of-three-falls main event. Actually, the third fall was tainted when Dutch Mantel, Tiger Ali Singh, Herberto Lopez, and Commissioner Savio Vega interfered. Somehow, in the midst of the chaos, Apolo pinned Shane to win the bout.

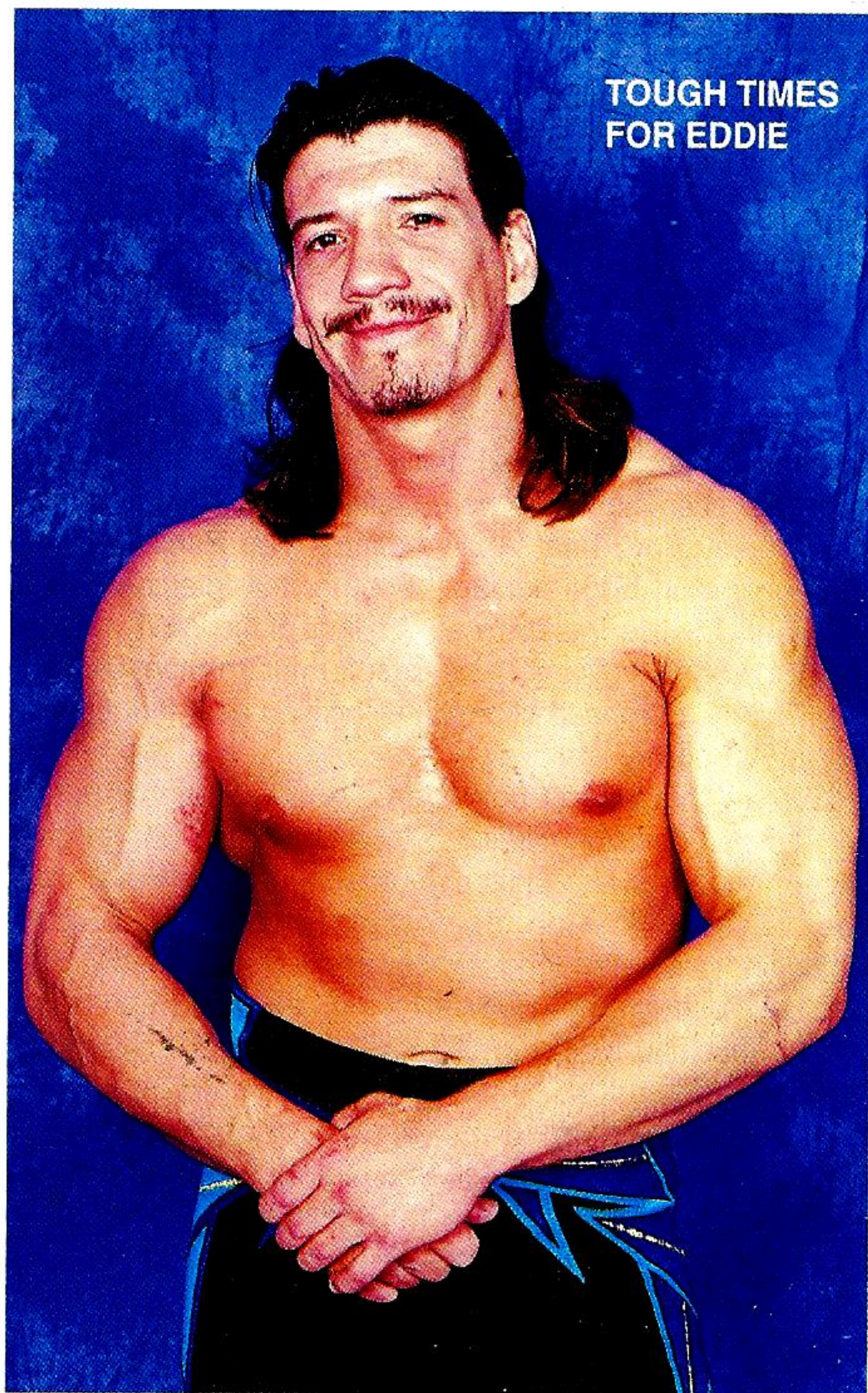
In other top bouts, Super Crazy defeated former ECW and NWA champ Steve Corino ... Singh and Pain beat Los Boricuas for the tag team title ... Crazy won a battle royal for the hardcore championship ... Victor the Bodyguard beat Mahoney by disqualification.

News You Can Use Dept.: Fans of classic wrestling

should check out ESPN Classics on Saturdays at 7 a.m. In recent weeks, ESPN has aired *Wrestling Champions*, a Chicago-based program of the 1960s featuring stars such as Buddy Rogers and Crusher Lisowski, *Big Time Wrestling*, the Detroit-based program of the 1970s featuring The Sheik and Bobo Brazil, and *Southwest Championship Wrestling* of the early-1980s featuring Tully Blanchard and Rocky Johnson.

This 'n' that: David Taylor declined the WWF's request to relocate as a trainer for the HWA and Ohio Valley Wrestling and has left the company ... Inferno Kid appeared on UPN's reality series, *Shipmates* ... Midget star Lord Littlebrook is recovering from hip replacement surgery ... WWF star Eddie Guerrero was recently charged with driving under the influence and subsequently released from the company.

The wrestling community suffered some losses since the last "Names Makin' News." I send my condolences to the family and friends of Chris Adams, and a special sympathy note to the family of Helen Hart, who died at the age of 76. The wife of Stu and the mother of Bret and Owen always had a kindness that seemed to radiate. Just a two-minute clip on television would leave me with the feeling that she was a very nice person. □



TOUGH TIMES
FOR EDDIE

data sheet

ROB VAN DAM

HEIGHT: 6'

WEIGHT: 237

HOMETOWN: Battle Creek, MI

GREATEST MOMENT TO DATE:

Long-time RVD fans might choose something from his ECW glory days, but we'll go with his win over Jeff Hardy for the WWF hardcore title at Invasion. It was his first big match in the WWF, and he shut up critics who doubted he'd be able to shine in the biggest of big leagues

HE DOES IT SO WELL: Pleases crowds. Van Dam realizes people love innovative, high-risk moves. He's willing to endure pain in executing a move if it'll get a rise out of the crowd. He's an amazing high-spot artist

WHERE HE NEEDS TO IMPROVE:

A big knock against RVD has been that he's strictly a high-spot artist. Maybe at one point, but not anymore. For the sake of his (and his opponents') long-term future, though, he ought to tone down the high-risk stuff a bit

PET FINISHER: Five-star frog splash

BIGGEST TEST TO DATE: A fractured tibia suffered in January 2000 kept him out for three-plus months. When he returned, we all wondered if he'd be the same. After a few matches, he looked better than ever

OUTLOOK FOR 2002: Still looks very good! Although RVD appeared to get bumped out of the WWF's top tier after No Mercy, we have to think that'll only be temporary. He's too talented and popular not to become the WWF's next breakout star. Major feuds with Steve Austin and/or The Rock should be in his future

QUICKIE EXPERT ANALYSIS:

"What did it tell you when WWF fans, who were conditioned to hate everything about the Alliance, immediately took to RVD? For one thing, it tells you just how damn good Rob Van Dam is."

—Paul Heyman



RUSS & CHARLIE HAAS

HEIGHT: Russ—6'2", Charlie—6'2"

WEIGHT: Russ—245, Charlie—265

HOMETOWN: Edmond, OK

GREATEST MOMENT TO DATE:

No doubt about it—it was the day the WWF signed the brothers to a developmental deal

THEY DO IT SO WELL: Work together. Russ and Charlie seem to move as one person when executing double-team moves, especially those that they created themselves

WHERE THEY NEED TO

IMPROVE: The finer points of the

game. These two former standout amateur wrestlers at Seton Hall University still need to smooth out some of the rough edges. They have plenty of great moves and are strong and quick.

Once they get a little more experience, they'll be ready to become stars

PET FINISHER: Total Haastility

BIGGEST TEST TO DATE:

Adapting. Going from the independents to wrestling and training in Memphis Championship Wrestling, then moving on to the Heartland Wrestling Association, all in such a short time, was tough on them. The addition of the WCW developmentals to the HWA mix only made things more difficult, but competing against athletes with so many different styles and working under numerous trainers will benefit them in the long run

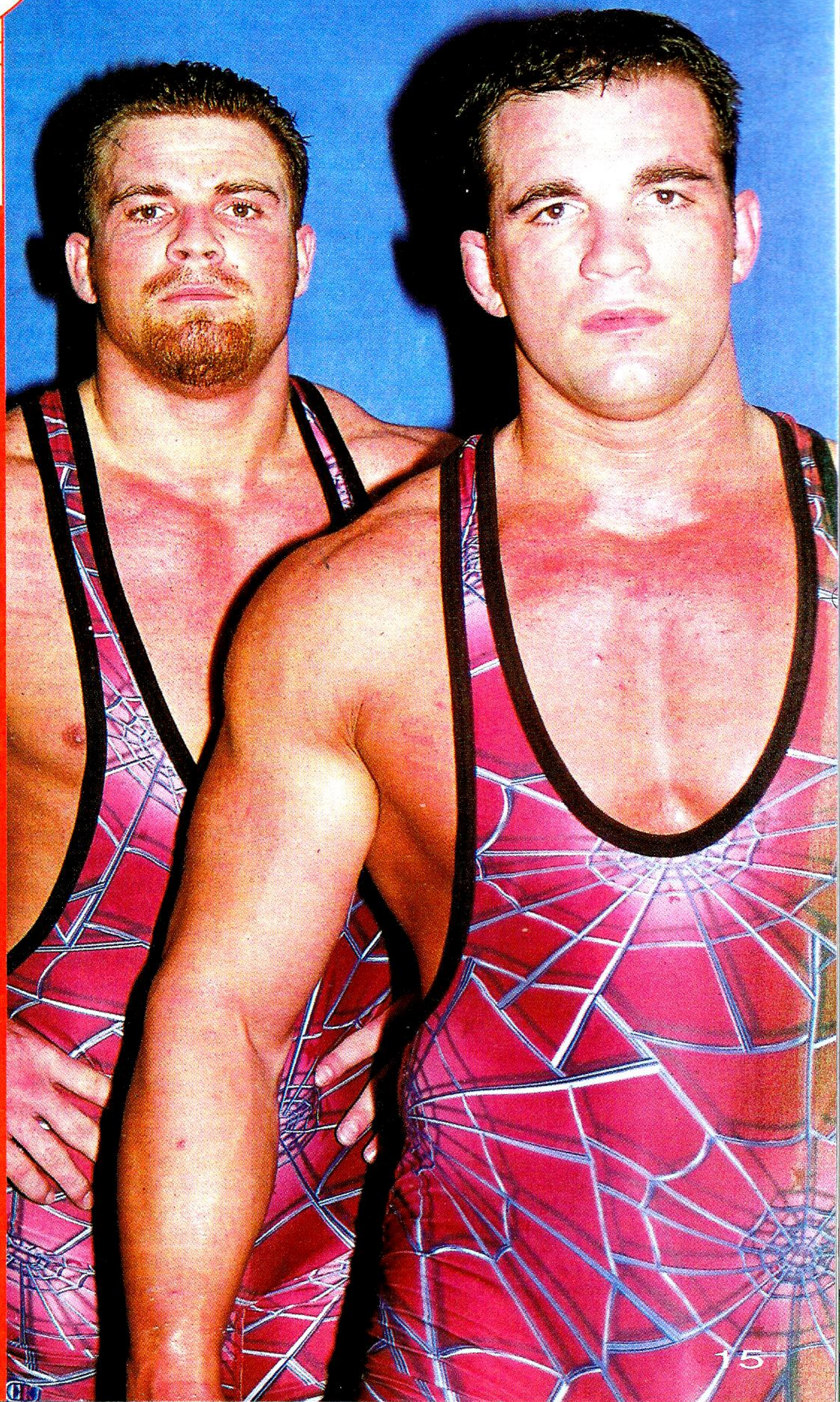
OUTLOOK FOR 2002: Expect these two to step up to the WWF shortly after the beginning of the year.

Since the WWF is in need of fresh tag teams (not those made up of two solo stars), they could be in line for an immediate push

QUICKIE EXPERT ANALYSIS:

"They're true students of the sport. Both of them train, eat, and sleep professional wrestling. That's why I think they'll go far in this business." —ECWA

promoter/trainer Jim Kettner



on the road

With Dave Lenker

A COUPLE OF months ago, I read an interesting online column about the possibility of the WWF expanding its business in the European market. The Fed does extremely well overseas, and whenever it tours England, for example, its shows easily sell out. That being the case, it was suggested that instead of running two separate North American promotions (WWF and whatever the Alliance winds up being), the Fed should instead run one North American promotion and one European promotion, which would be named WWF Europe.

Great idea. The Alliance invasion of the WWF was botched so badly that the Alliance name (and the names of WCW and ECW, for that matter) might never be able to sustain a successful promotion. Adding a slew of WWF wrestlers into an Alliance locker room might not work, either. Except for Booker T and Rob Van Dam, did

any Alliance wrestler really benefit from having been hired by the WWF?

Those points made the WWF's November U.K. pay-per-view, *Rebellion*, all the more intriguing. I've made trips to the WWF's U.K.-only pay-per-views before, but this was different, because my agenda was so different. I wasn't there to examine the WWF's performance—at least that wasn't my main mission. Instead, I was there to watch the fans in attendance and gauge their response to every aspect of the WWF product. Robbed of live WWF events for most of the year, English fans figured to have an abundance of enthusiasm stored up for this show. And they did.

The WWF generally likes to start off its pay-per-views on a strong note. By putting on a match with five-star potential early, the WWF banks that it'll be easier to keep the fans' attention during the matches that aren't so anticipated. It usually works, and it did this time around, too. The English fans were even treated to a sight that we here in North America haven't seen yet: a steel cage match between Edge and Christian.

It's funny. In some circles, Christian is regarded as a better wrestler than Edge. Because of Edge's looks, size, and charisma, however, he's expected to have a much more successful career. In fact, in North America, Edge has already distanced himself from Christian. While Edge is seen as someone right on the cusp of the top tier, Christian is thought of as a solid mid-card talent.

Not in England. The fans at the Manchester Evening News Arena heckled Christian just as passionately as they cheered for Edge. The reaction for neither man stood out as stronger than the other, though Edge was obviously the more popular wrestler. And when Edge defeated Christian by escaping the cage first, he was cheered mightily, but I got the feeling that had Christian won, he would have been cheered as well.

Not all the other matches on the card were as exciting as Edge and Christian's, but the fans didn't seem to care. They're so hungry for big-time wrestling that a match as mundane as "Diamond" Dallas Page against The Big Show received surprising interest from the audience. Let's face it: Page hadn't wrestled in months and didn't do all that well in his WWF debut to begin with, and Show is slowly starting to become the Lex Luger of his generation (he's done so little with so much potential). In the States, a match between these two would have been the cue for the audience to head to the bathrooms and concession stands. That didn't happen in Britain.



We've seen an Edge vs. Christian ladder match in the U.S., but U.K. fans were happy that they got the first cage match between the two. Just about the whole *Rebellion* card got a good response from the British crowd. Can anyone say WWF Europe?

Believe it or not, the fans were into this match just as much as they were into the match between Edge and Christian. In many ways, it was refreshing, and it gave me a new respect for two men I had come to take for granted. Show's choke-slam of DDP even earned one of the night's loudest ovations.

The main event, WWF champion "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin vs. The Rock, was one that North American fans have been waiting to see ever since WrestleMania X-Seven. Though these two have faced each other on a number of house shows since 'Mania, they haven't squared off against each other on TV. Rebellion fixed all that. But if you live in North America, the only place you could've seen that match was at WWF New York. The match didn't disappoint, but it wasn't one of their all-time classics, either (interference from Chris Jericho and Kurt Angle prevented that). But the match gave the WWF's English fans something that its North American fans have been waiting to see—and that made the Brits feel special, if only for a short time.

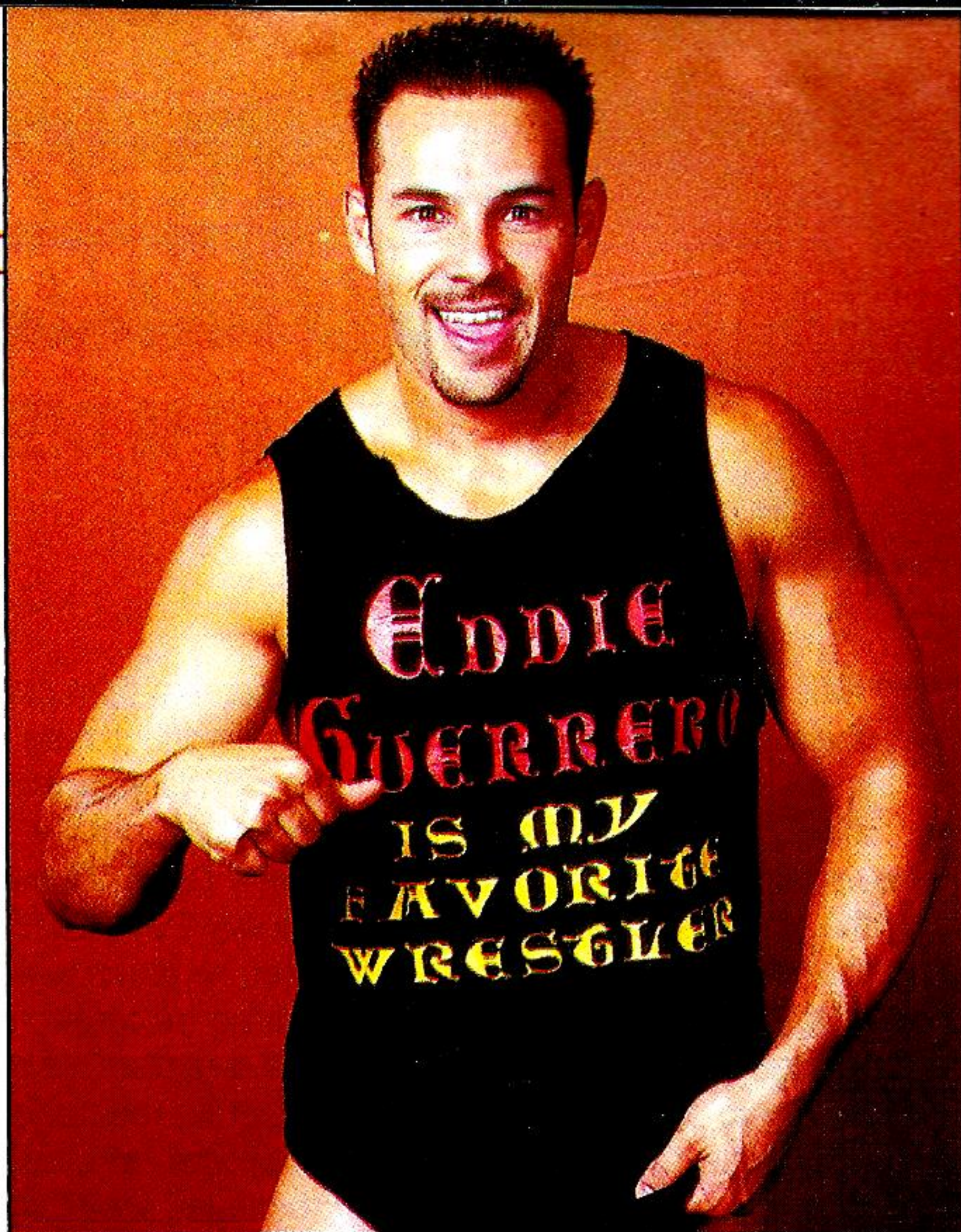
Interestingly enough, the WWF also ran some house shows on this side of the Atlantic that same weekend. Booker T, Test, The Undertaker, Kane, and Rob Van Dam all remained in the U.S. for those shows. In case you don't understand the significance of that, here's what it means: The WWF ran a pay-per-view featuring Austin, Rock, Jericho, Angle, The Dudley Boyz, The Hardy Boyz, the APA, and Edge and Christian, among others, but still had enough talent to run spot shows with other top tier-caliber wrestlers.

Amazing, but true.

Perhaps the most interesting thing about Rebellion, however, was the use of a pair of underappreciated Alliance members, Chavo Guerrero Jr. and Hugh Morrus. More often than not, Guerrero and Morrus are left off *Raw* and *Smackdown*. If they're seen at all, it's usually because there's been an Alliance meeting of some sort. On Rebellion, however, Guerrero and Morrus held high-profile positions: They were the official interviewers for the divas match, which had Torrie Wilson and Lita squaring off against Stacy Keibler and Mighty Molly, with Trish Stratus acting as the special referee.

Seem like it would be comical? You'd be right. First, the bungling duo walked in on a topless Trish Stratus (her back was toward them). Then they interrupted Lita in her dressing room while she was changing. When they entered Molly's dressing room, she threw them out, too (her cape wasn't on).

The skits were very funny, and they proved that if given a chance to perform overseas, the WWF wrestlers who are considered excess baggage by many North American fans could become the foundation for the next great WWF enterprise. I hope I wasn't the only one who noticed that. □



Chavo Guerrero Jr. (above) and Hugh Morrus (below) barely get any time on *Raw* and *Smackdown*, yet they can be quite entertaining, as they proved at Rebellion. Perhaps they could be a big part of a Europe-based branch of the WWF.



behind the dressing room door

With Frank Krewda

TAZZ HAS BEEN called the most miserable man on the planet a lot lately, but I always chalked that statement up to wrestling hokum. My dealings with the man, although limited, have always been cordial.

Nowadays, though, I can understand why he might be living the gimmick. I'll even go so far as to say that if Tazz is *not* the most miserable man on the planet, he damn well should be. The WWF—his employer—is killing his career.

Say what you want about former ECW wrestlers who jumped ship to the WWF or WCW, the fact is, men and women wrestle to make money and become famous. Sure, some wrestlers say they're in it because they get some satisfaction from the "art" of performing, but believe me, that kind of abstract gratification wears off with each missed payoff from some obscure indy promoter.

Make no mistake, Tazz joined the WWF to advance. Tazz rose to stardom under the guidance of Paul Heyman in ECW. He was the strong, determined, silent wrestler you just didn't want to anger. The image worked perfectly for him. The image he has in the WWF now isn't so flattering.

his career. And since I don't cash his paychecks, I can't say that he hasn't. But if the move was intended to put him on the golden road to bigger and better things, I can't believe his tenure in the WWF has played out the way he thought or hoped it would. The federation humiliates him at every turn. Repeatedly. Overwhelmingly. With an exclamation point.

Whether it's squashing him against established superstars (Steve Austin, Chris Jericho) or mid-level performers (Raven), or having him beaten down by unworthy opponents (Maven), the WWF seems determined to erase the shoot-style ECW powerhouse from wrestling history. And nobody, not even the man himself, could convince me that it isn't eating him up inside.

Of course, Tazz hasn't told me this himself. And trying to extract such an admission from him would be a long trip down the road to nowhere. Tazz, after all, is not a foolish man. Proud? Yes. But not foolish. Only a pure fool would

(Continued on page 83)

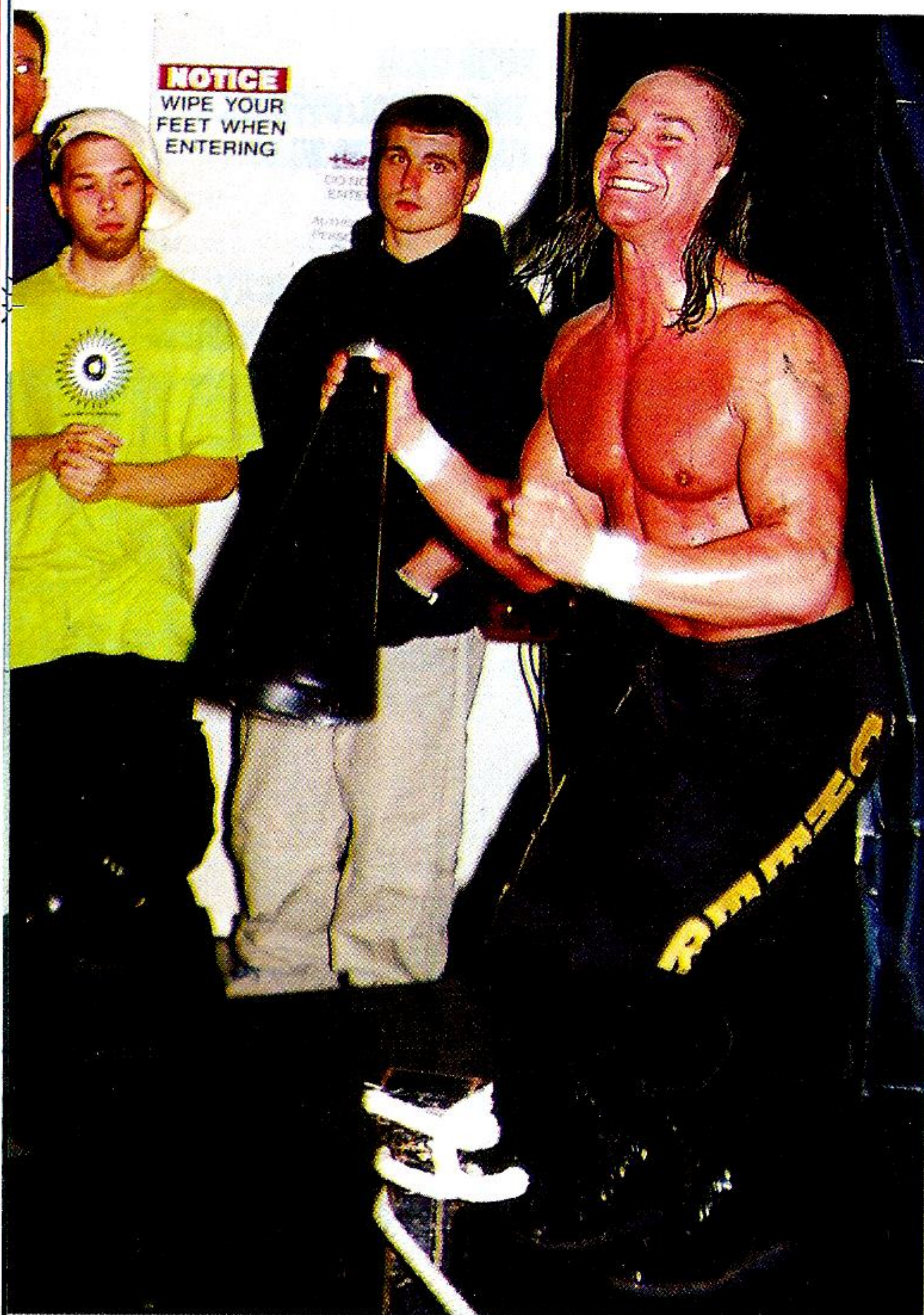


the insider

By Brandi Mankiewicz

(The opinions expressed in "The Insider" are those of Brandi Mankiewicz alone and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of anyone else on the staff of this magazine.)

SOMETIMES THIS WRESTLING business seems just a little too ridiculous for my tastes. Everyone wants in on the act. Just because you have a primitive Web site and have interviewed a bottom-feeding independent wrestler about his career doesn't make you a wrestling journalist. Here's a little tip: In order to be a wrestling journalist, you should first have a degree in journalism or a related field, like English or communications. And being a legal adult helps, too.



The perky Pepper Parks might not look like your typical manly wrestler, but his skills left me impressed. What was more impressive, though, was just how vehemently the fans reacted to him.

Just hanging around "the boys" doesn't make you a wrestling journalist, expert, or insider, either. If you're picking up wrestlers at an airport or picking up the tab at Denny's, you're just their servant. You will never be on the same level as even the lowliest indy wrestler. That is, unless you pay your dues. Even then you might not be granted access to the private underworld of wrestling.

Despite what the logo on this page reads, I don't consider myself an "insider" in the same way most Internet geeks think they are. Sure, my address book reads like a who's who of the wrestling world, and my voice mail is often filled with messages from a wide cast of characters. But that doesn't make me an "insider." What makes me an "insider" is the level of respect that I have garnered through my seven years of formally studying this business and reporting on it as only the class of 1994's Outstanding Journalism Graduate from my university could. You might hate me. Hell, some wrestlers hate me, but I still have almost everyone's respect.

Unfortunately, it's been increasingly difficult to follow wrestling recently. There are too many kids calling themselves reporters and not enough actual journalists covering this business. Usually I get a chuckle from a lot of the garbage that I see online and the e-mails that I get from teenagers trying to score a job with us. But that all changed recently.

Now, I'm not an easily agitated person, but this chaos in wrestling has been weighing on my mind. Feeling burned out and disenchanted, I scheduled a vacation to help me to find my smile, to borrow a famous phrase from Yawn Michaels. Where do you go to get away from it all? A little voice in my head said "Aruba," while a little voice in my heart said, "Les Thatcher's Heartland Wrestling Association." Needless to say, my heart won out.

I made the 600-mile trek to Cincinnati in my Jeep, enjoying the chance to get out on the road again. When I found the Red Barn Flea Market in Batavia, Ohio, where the Saturday night show was taking place, I felt like I stepped into another realm. There were about 400 or so fans intently focused on the match that was taking place in the ring. It was Pepper Parks, number 500 in this year's "PWI 500," against Jimmy Yang, the former Jung Dragon who would become my pet by the end of my stay.

The two had a solid match, but that wasn't the most compelling part of the experience. I was most fascinated by watching the fans. These fans were reacting to everything. Over the next hour or so, I stood watching the crowd and the matches while camouflaged in anonymity

(Continued on page 84)

on assignment

By Liz Hunter

ARE TODAY'S WWF divas in it for the fame ... or for the love of the game? A good indicator is whether a given diva demonstrates progress within a reasonable amount of time. Is this individual more



Chyna might very well go down as the most famous WWF diva of the last 20 years, yet as much as Liz Hunter likes and respects her, she thinks she did a lot more harm than good for women's wrestling.

entertaining or more skilled than she was a year ago? Or does she seem satisfied with simply being in front of a camera, relying on the hoots, chants, and whistles as the only barometer of her success?

A few divas in recent history have demonstrated love of the business. When you love doing something, you try to figure out every nuance and every subtle way to improve. Triple-H, Kurt Angle, Steve Austin, and The Rock all made the top tier because of their curiosity and desire to learn. On the female side, Debra would be in that category. She went from being the always-silent wife of Steve McMichael to being the crown-wearing queen of WCW within a couple of months. In the past, the same was true with Tammy Sytch and Sherri Martel.

All of those women demonstrated a grasp of wrestling psychology, how to be catty and popular at the same time, and forwarding a storyline without it resembling bad fifth-grade acting. I don't think Chyna mastered the psychological aspect until her angle with Eddie Guerrero. From a physical standpoint, however, no female—of the modern era at least—has strived for such a high level of excellence.

Today's WWF divas have the character depth of those Barker's beauties lounging upon car hoods on *The Price Is Right*. Trish Stratus, Torrie Wilson, and Stacy Keibler: They are completely interchangeable. Trish Stratus? Kissing Vince McMahon in front of his sick wife made her bad. Getting Linda off her medication made her good. Torrie Wilson? The fact that she sacrificed her standing in the Alliance to hold Tajiri's hand tells me nothing about her as a person. What aspect of her personality led to that sacrifice? Neither the WWF creative team nor Wilson has explained that motivation. Stacy Keibler? I suppose wearing glasses and camouflage may fool some people into thinking she's from Dudleyville. I imagine these women are earning close to six-figure salaries for these dramatic tidbits and two-minute slapfests.

And I imagine these women go back to the hotel thinking they've worked really hard. And when their good looks begin to fade, they'll wonder why they don't have a future. They'll pull a Rena Mero, go to *Entertainment Tonight*, and blame the business.

Like the last couple of generations, Gen-X and Gen-Y, these women don't have a clue as to what tough times are. Try being a female wrestler in the 1950s, when not only did the business have a chauvinistic attitude toward women,

(Continued on page 85)

SCOTT STEINER SEEMS ready to make his return to the WWF, but is the WWF ready for Scott Steiner? ... Born on July 29, 1962 ... Followed his older brother, Rick, to the University of Michigan, where he was a standout amateur wrestler ... In 1986, he made his professional debut in the Continental Wrestling Alliance, beating The Great Wojo in his first match ... Started teaming with Rick to help him in his feud with Kevin Sullivan's Varsity Club (*"They never shoulda messed with the Steiner boys"*) ... Introduced North American fans to the huracanrana, which Steiner dubbed the Frankensteiner (*"Don't ever use huracanrana when I'm around"*) ... With Rick, won the NWA World tag team title by beating Jimmy Garvin and Michael Hayes on November 1, 1989 ... The Steiners shocked The Road Warriors at Starrcade '89 by securing a rare pinfall victory over them in a round-robin "Ironman" tournament ... Scott pulled off a huge upset when he pinned Ric Flair in a nationally televised match (*"Made it look pretty damn easy, too"*) ... Rick and Scott's first reign as NWA World tag team champs ended when Doom, Ron Simmons (Faarooq) and Butch Reed, beat them for the belts on May 19, 1990, in Washington, D.C. ... The brothers traveled to Japan and defeated Hiroshi Hase and Kensuke Sasaki to win New Japan's IWGP tag Inter-

national team championship on March 21, 1991 (*"That was a tough, stiff match"*) ... With help from Nikita Koloff, Rick and Scott defeated Lex Luger and Sting at SuperBrawl on May 19. Despite Koloff's interference, *Pro Wrestling Illustrated* readers voted it



It'll be interesting to see how Booker T (and everyone else) reacts if and when Scott Steiner shows up on WWF TV. Booker defeated "Big Poppa Pump" for the WCW World title on the final edition of *Nitro* back in March.

1991's Match of the Year ... The brothers won their third NWA World tag team title by beating Arn Anderson and Bobby Eaton on May 3, 1992; they won their second IWGP tag team title by beating Vader and Bam Bam Bigelow on June 26 (*"Didn't break a sweat in either match"*) ... Scott captured his first major singles title by beating Rick Steamboat for the TV

championship on September 29. The NWA stripped him of the title after learning that he and Rick had signed with the WWF ... Rick and Scott defeated Money Inc.—Ted DiBiase and Irwin R. Schyster—to win their first of two WWF World tag team titles on

June 14, 1993 (*"No way a team with a name that stupid was gonna beat us"*) ... Spent the next couple of years competing primarily in Japan, where he continued to team with Rick. The Steiners also wrestled for ECW a few times before re-signing with WCW in 1996 ... Feuding with the New World Order took its toll on the brothers, as Scott turned against Rick in early-1998 and joined the NWO as Hollywood Hogan's star protege ... "Big Poppa Pump" was born ... Won the vacant U.S. title by beating Sting in a tournament final on April 16, 2000. The win was the biggest of his career to that point (*"One of many times I embarrassed that face-painted freak"*) ... Defeated Booker T to capture his first WCW World heavy-weight title on November 26, 2000 ... Victories over Kevin Nash and Sid Vicious cemented his title

reign as one of the most impressive in years (*"They're big guys, but I'm a genetic freak"*) ... Lost the WCW title to Booker T on the final *Nitro* on March 26, 2001 ... Contract with AOL Time Warner expired in early-December, so no one would be surprised to see him show up on WWF TV (*"My freaks have been keeping me in top shape"*). □



SCOTT STEINER

306

whatever happened to...

By Scott Teal

JIMMY VALIANT

LONG-TIME FANS might be surprised to learn that it's been three full decades since a clean-shaven young lad named Jimmy Valiant made his first appearance in Madison Square Garden. It was way back in 1971 when he first set foot in that building—and he's still wrestling today!

Jimmy grew up in Hammond, Indiana, the son of a farmer-turned-millwright. As a youngster, he would shoot marbles with friends in front of the Hammond Civic Center. Little did he know that by the mid-1970s, he'd be wrestling Dick the Bruiser before a sellout crowd in that building.

"What a thrill that was," he recalled. "I wrestled in front of 23,000 people at Madison Square Garden, but when I came back to the Hammond Civic Center, that was more of a thrill than selling out the Garden."

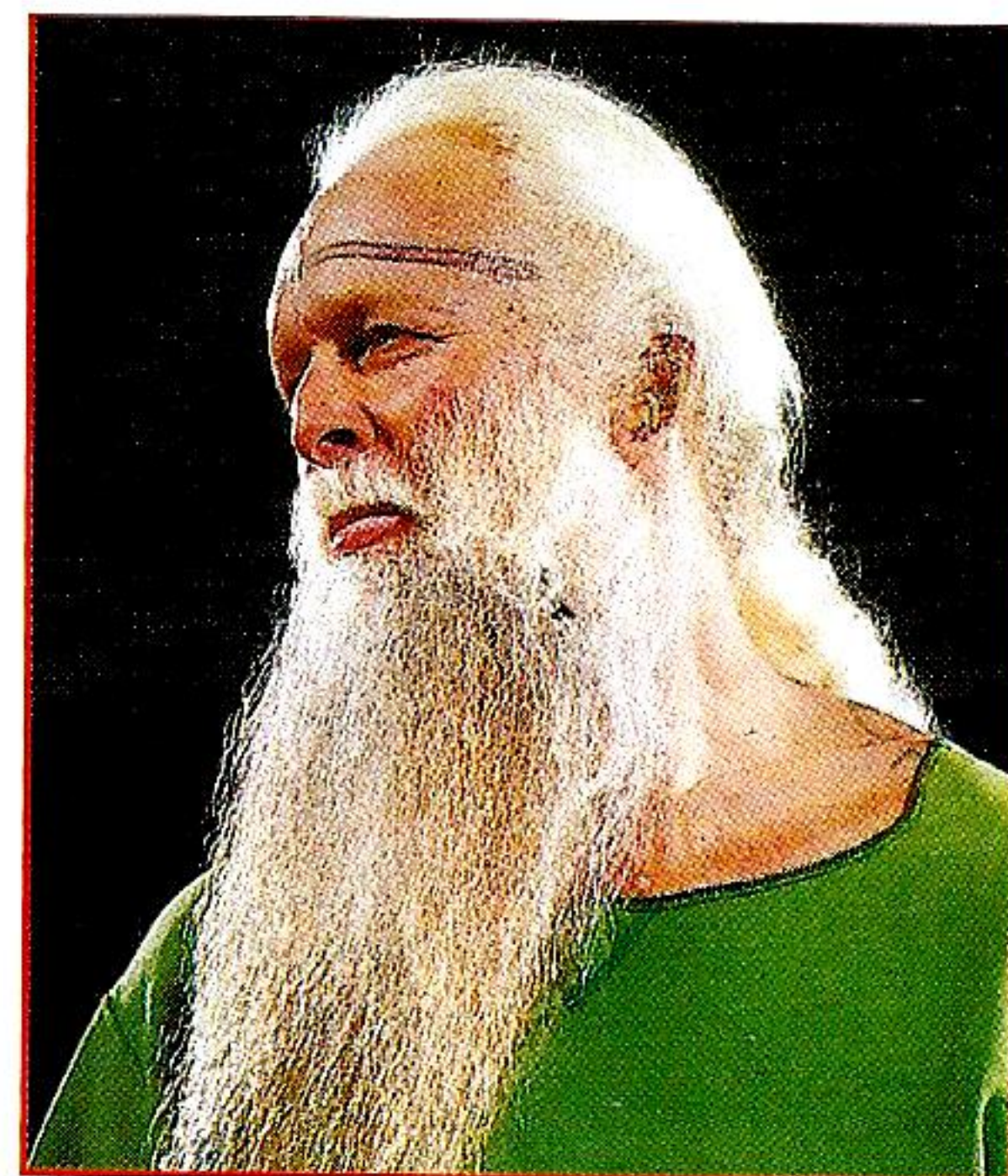
Jimmy was given his break by an old-time wrestler named Frank Zella, who helped him get started. His first pro match took place in Chicago, where he and his friend Gary Molinour teamed as Jimmy and Gary Val-

entine. "The first wrestling match I ever saw live ... I was in it!" he said. "The first ring I stepped into was on the night I had my first match. It happened so fast."

Two years after his debut, he wrestled in Tennessee as "Big" Jim McDonald, then went to work for Sam Muchnick in St. Louis as Jimmy "The Body" Valen. When he arrived in Dallas, promoter Fritz Von Erich renamed him yet again. "I went in as Jimmy Valentine," he recalled, "but Johnny Valentine was a big star in Texas, so Fritz looked at me and said, 'Your name is ... Jimmy ... Valiant.' He named me right on the spot."

He gained his first real fame when he returned to Indiana as "Handsome" Jimmy Valiant to team with "Luscious" Johnny Valiant as the Valiant brothers. But in 1982, "Handsome" Jimmy Valiant disappeared forever. In his place was a character named "Boogie Woogie Man" Jimmy Valiant. "Boogie's" ring entrance was heralded by the song "Boy From New York City," and the fans loved him.

"Back when I started the 'Boogie



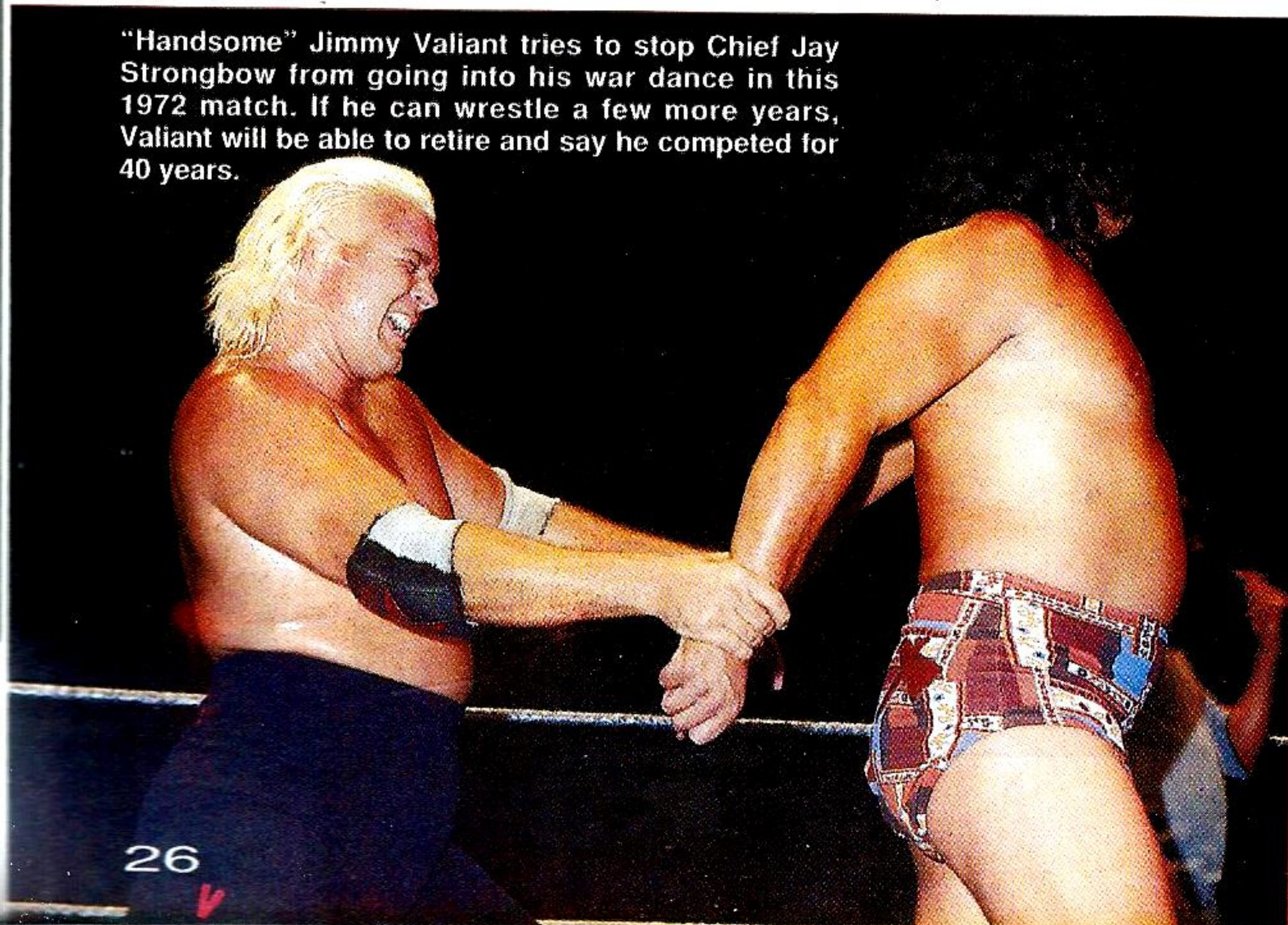
Woogie' gimmick, I looked around and saw so many blond pretty boys. A lot of guys had beards, but no one had a long beard, so I decided it was time to change. 'Boogie Woogie' gave me a shot in the arm and a complete new career. If you have a 20-year run in the business, you're doing great! But I had a 20-year run as 'Handsome' Jimmy, then started another 20 as 'Boogie Woogie.' That was almost unheard of."

Jimmy now runs a wrestling camp in Shawsville, Virginia. "I always had a dream of giving something back to the wrestling business, so I told my beautiful wife, Angel, about it," he said. "We put our minds together and built a building on our property where we hold our camp. We train 52 Sundays a year from 12 noon until four."

Jimmy's goal is to wrestle until the year 2004. "I started in '64 and want to go to 2004. I'm just a little under three years away, then I'm gonna finish," he added. Jimmy has also set up a hall of fame and museum at his school. He invites everyone—participants and spectators—to join him on Sundays.

(Scott Teal publishes the newsletter "Whatever Happened To ...?" He can be reached at: P.O. Box 2781, Hendersonville, TN 37077-2781. Web site: www.1wrestlinglegends.com) □

"Handsome" Jimmy Valiant tries to stop Chief Jay Strongbow from going into his war dance in this 1972 match. If he can wrestle a few more years, Valiant will be able to retire and say he competed for 40 years.



plain speaking

With Matt Brock

Harder than nails, veteran wrestling reporter Matt Brock has logged more miles covering wrestling than any other journalist. Every month Matt will travel to the sport's hotbeds, reporting everything he sees without fear or favor

MANCHESTER, ENGLAND:

This isn't the first time this beat has taken me across the pond, but I think it's the first time I've ever set foot in a joint called the Manchester Evening News Arena. Makes me wonder if the morning paper has its own arena, too. Came to Manchester for the WWF's latest U.K.-only pay-per-view,

Rebellion. I have to say that it shows an awful lot of gumption for a group of Americans to walk into England and make the locals pay to watch something named Rebellion. Wonder if the WWF's crack marketing staff gave that any consideration, but I doubt it. The name didn't keep the fans away, though. It's cards like this that can almost make the WWF forget about the slipping TV ratings and decreased attendance back stateside. That is, except for the wrestling. The WWF is in a funk, no matter what side of the ocean it's on. Big Show and Dallas Page had a very forgettable match. Hard to believe these guys were headlining WCW PPVs back when that company was routinely outdrawing the WWF. Edge and Christian put on a good match, and you'd expect nothing less from those two, but it didn't seem special. Steve Austin pinned The Rock on top—after interference from Chris Jericho. Back in 1992, the WWF held SummerSlam in Wembley Stadium, and damn close to 80,000 fans turned out. The atmosphere was electric, and it pushed Davey Boy Smith and Bret Hart to one of the best matches of either man's career. Rebellion was just another edition of *Smackdown* with a different name. Hardly seemed worth the 18-hour round trip flight or the extra four hours going through security checkpoints when I could have seen pretty much the same thing on any Thursday night.

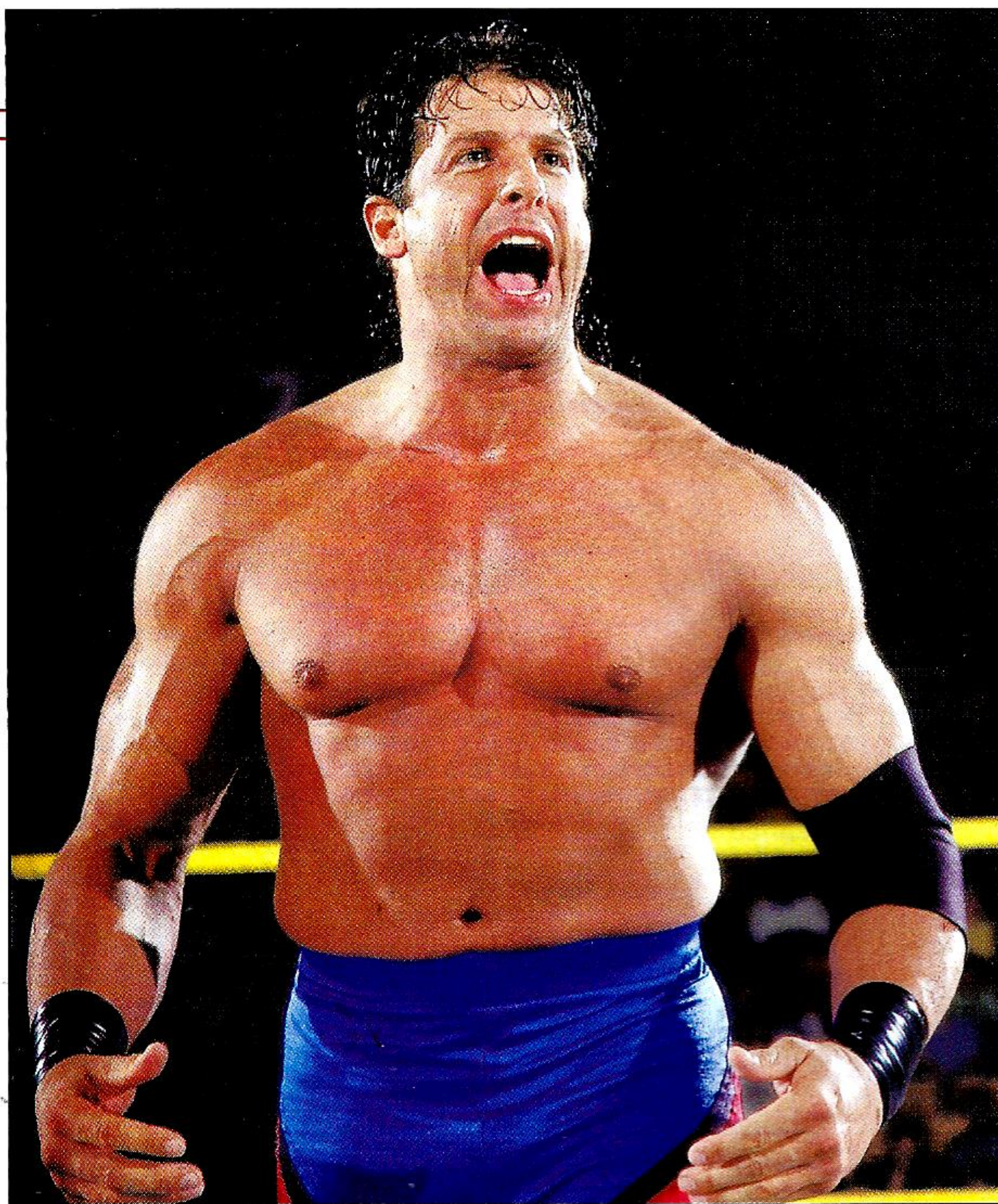
TORONTO, ONTARIO: From merry old England to the country that still puts the Queen's mug on the currency. Tickets for WrestleMania went on sale today, and they're already claiming SkyDome is close to sold out, with ringside seats going for almost 300 smackers. Asked a few fans what the main event would be.



THE PATRIOT

Rock vs. Austin seemed to be the consensus, but that's already happened in two Manias. Some folks hadn't even thought about it, which astounded me. Why drop a week's pay when you don't have the slightest idea of who's fighting? Sure, WrestleMania is this sport's Super Bowl, and it sells itself. But I just can't get excited until I have an idea of how the title picture is shaping up. For all we know, the main event could be Stephanie McMahon-Helmsley vs. Stacy Keibler for control of ECW. Nothing makes sense in the WWF anymore. Apparently, that just doesn't matter to some fans.

KEANSBURG, NJ: Still not exactly sure what's going on with the NWA title, which was held up following a match between Shinya Hashimoto and Steve Corino in October. Last I heard, Corino was retiring, and I don't know if Hashimoto plans to wrestle full-time in the States. And Howard Brody just announced he was stepping down from the NWA board of directors due to personal reasons. None of that mattered here in Keansburg. Almost 700 fans turned out to raise about \$10,000 for the victims of the World Trade Center attack. Raising money for various September 11 funds seems to be the trend with a lot of indy promotions. Needless to say, The Patriot got quite a reaction from the crowd as he easily took care of "Jumbo" Joe Gunns. The Wall and "Dangerous" Danny Doring tore the house down in an old WCW vs. ECW tables match, with Wall coming out on top. In case anyone wondered, this isn't the same Patriot who had a cup of coffee with the WWF a few years back, but Tom Brandi, the guy under the getup now, is an underrated talent if you ask me. You want to know what to do about the title? Set up a round-robin tournament with Hashimoto, Doring, Patriot, and Wall. My two cents, take it or leave it.



RICO CONSTANTINO

JEFFERSONVILLE, IN: Always like coming back to the Danny Davis Arena and catching some Ohio Valley Wrestling. Takes me back to the good old days, with some good old boys throwing back some beers, smoking a stogie or two, and cheering on their favorites. Usually, once I settle into my seat in the back of the barn, I can sit back and let my cares fade away. Not today. The boys here in OVW just got word that the WWF released about nine percent of its office staff. It's a sign of the times, and a lot of the wrestlers down here are nervous. First they get rid of some of the suits. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that some of the developmental prospects will be the next to get pink slips. It's hard to focus on competing when you wonder if you're going to have a job waiting for you when you get back to the

locker room. The wrestlers weren't the only ones feeling preoccupied. After the card, I went back to my car and found I'd left the headlights on. You'd think with all the miles I put on ol' Bessy, I'd have AAA; course, you'd be wrong. So I started digging through the trunk, looking for jumper cables, when I heard someone call out behind me. "Having a senior moment there, Brock?" It was Rico "The Role Model" Constantino, formerly a member of the despised Bolin Services. He's been in the good graces of the fans ever since The Prototype turned against him. After a bit of ribbing, Rico brought his car over and helped me with a jump. Terrific prospect and a nice guy to boot. For the first time in his career, Constantino seems to have his head on straight. Here's hoping that the WWF has big plans for his future. □

Now We're Going To School!

OUR 2001

REPORT CARDS

FOR THE STARS

IT'S REPORT CARD time! You need not be afraid, though, friends, for the report cards that we're handing out don't reflect upon *your* hard work (or lack thereof) in any way whatsoever. Actually, we've prepared them for your enjoyment and entertainment.

See, the report cards that you're about to review aren't what most people would describe as normal. They certainly don't resemble anything that teachers or college professors hand out. English, math, social studies, and science aren't covered on these bad boys. These report cards are more akin to the reviews that working stiffs receive at the end of every year, though we're certain that ours are a tad more entertaining. After all, we're talking about report cards for professional wrestlers. It's not exactly rocket science.

There is a science to it, though. At the end of every year, we select top wrestlers and give them their grades in five categories. If they performed well, that'll be reflected in their grades—as will a year's worth of poor performances. And the five categories are as follows:

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Did the wrestler do what he or she set out to do in 2001? If he was a top contender to a world title when the year began, did he win the title during the year? Did he have goals that revolved around life issues? (Championship gold isn't the be-all and end-all of a wrestler's existence.) Keep in mind that the goals of no two wrestlers were exactly the same, either. As the saying goes, different strokes for different folks.

HEALTH: Did the wrestler stay out of the hospital in 2001? Or did he miss large amounts of time on the sidelines nursing injuries? Even if he didn't miss any action, did nagging injuries keep him from performing at his very best?

CREATIVITY: We're talking about how a wrestler advanced his repertoire in 2001, both in and out of the ring. Did he help himself get over by changing his personality? Or, in the case of Rob Van Dam, was his creativity found in his ever-changing and ever-adapting in-ring performance? This category can encompass just about anything.

MARKETABILITY: It doesn't matter how great a wrestler you are—if you're not marketable, you're never going to make it to the top. Marketability can be measured in many ways: Was his presence on a card enough to sell tickets and increase pay-per-view buy rates? How are T-shirt and foam finger sales doing? Has he shot his own Chef Boyardee commercial? Or is he usually found in group shots, just taking up space?

CAREER GROWTH: Is he a more successful wrestler now than he was at the start of 2001? Is he a more popular wrestler now than at the beginning of the year? Is he better known? Title wins (even world title wins) don't necessarily indicate that a wrestler's career is on the upswing.

This year's section is extra special. Because we decided to expand the section, we had to split it in half. In your hands, you hold the first half of the section; the second half will be featured in the May 2002 issue of *The Wrestler*, which is slated to hit newsstands on February 19. It's a can't-miss issue, as The Rock, Kurt Angle, and eight other stars will receive their report cards.

Don't wait until February to read the first 10, though. Plenty of wrestlers might not be anticipating this section, but we know that you have been.

STEVE AUSTIN

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: When he returned from spinal surgery in the fall of 2000, Austin had one goal in mind: to reclaim the WWF World heavyweight title that he had last held in the summer of 1999. During his time away from the sport, Austin watched Triple-H and Kurt Angle take advantage of his absence by becoming main-eventers without having to go through him. That ticked him off, so he vowed that 2001 would be the year of "The Rattlesnake." It was. As we were going to press, Austin had held the WWF title twice for a total reign time of nearly seven months in 2001. That's impressive, even if he did have to join the Alliance to make it all possible.

GRADE: A

HEALTH: Austin's career probably should be over. The fact that he's successfully competing against the sport's other top stars on a regular basis is testament to how much he wanted to return—and return at the highest level. He had to take a few weeks off here and there to rest bumps, bruises, cuts, and maybe a slight concussion or two, but Austin was a horse—and the Fed rode him pretty hard.

GRADE: B

CREATIVITY: Austin did anything and everything to stay vital. Who would have thought that one of the WWF's most popular stars ever would turn his back on the Fed and join a WCW/ECW alliance? Certainly not us. We once asserted (in a cover story, no less) that no matter what he did, Austin couldn't make people hate him. But he even partnered with long-time rival Triple-H in an effort to remake himself. His willingness to align with damn near anybody made every one of his segments must-see TV.

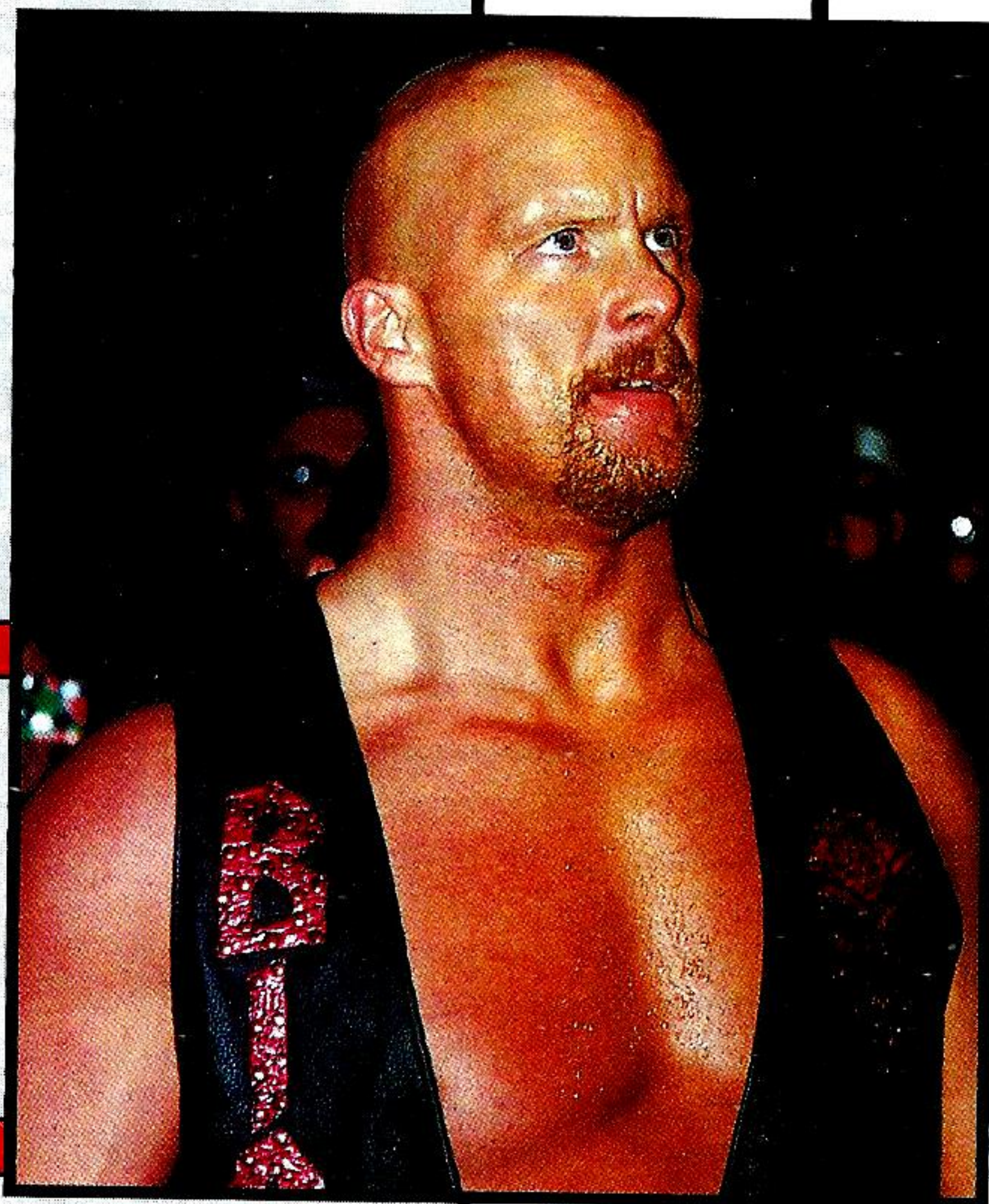
GRADE: B

MARKETABILITY: What?! Did you say something? What?! What?! What?! What?! No, a one-word catchphrase usually isn't very marketable (even Perry Saturn's "You're welcome" is a two-word catchphrase). Austin, though, found something with this simple, yet popular four-letter word. Fans loved chanting it with him despite the fact that he was the Alliance's lead heel. Eventually they started taunting him with it mercilessly. Imagine the T-shirt sales that could be realized if he actually becomes popular again. A prerecorded message for answering machines would probably sell well, too.

GRADE: A

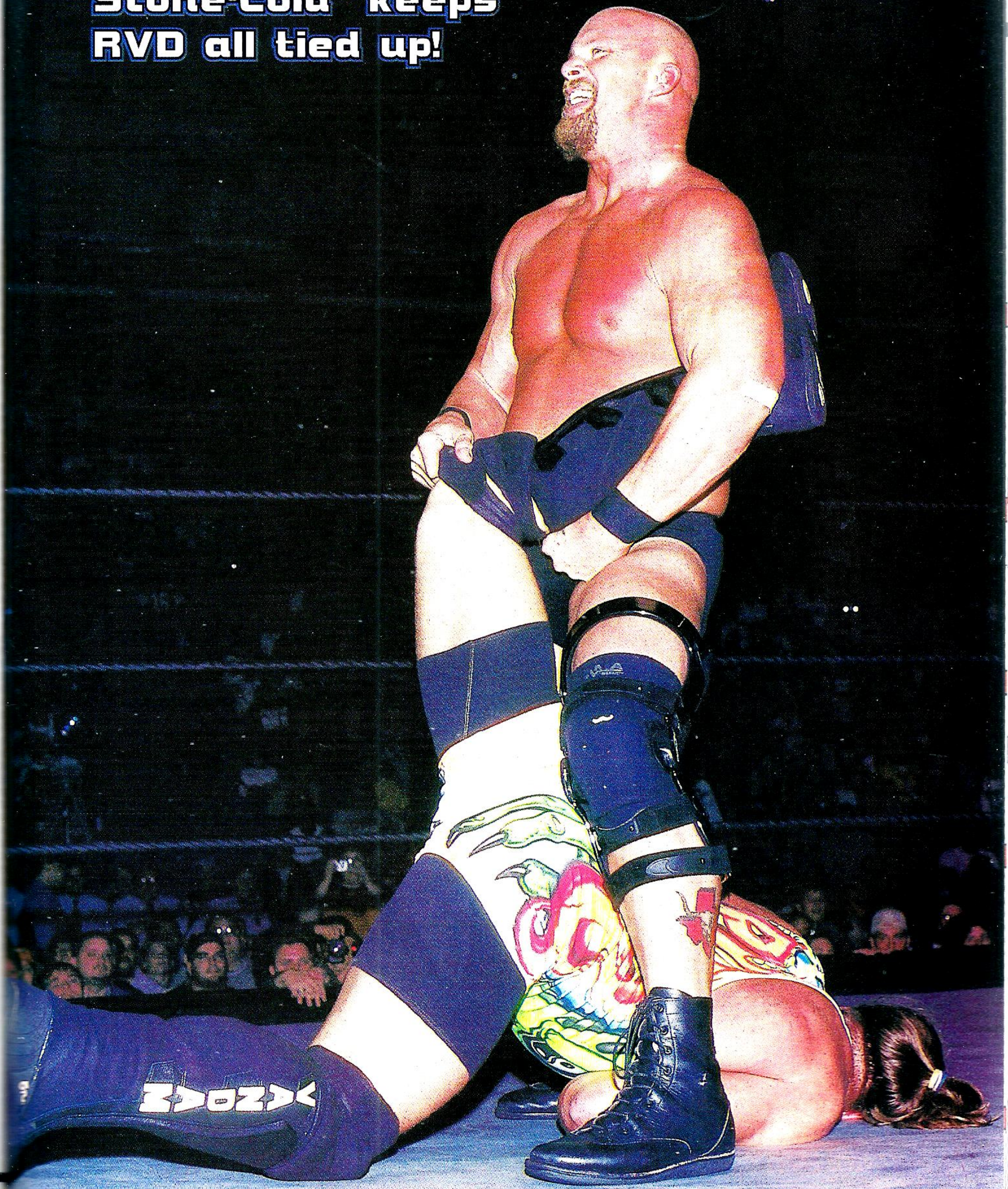
CAREER GROWTH: He's done everything there is to do in wrestling, which was why we were keeping a very close eye on his acting career a couple of years ago. But that was then, and now The Rock is the WWF's hottest entertainment commodity. Even *Nash Bridges* is no more; the Don Johnson vehicle aired its last original episode earlier this year. At least we know Austin will always be welcome on Howard Stern.

GRADE: C



REPORT CARD

**"Stone-Cold" keeps
RVD all tied up!**



CHRISTIAN

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Christian held the WWF Intercontinental and European titles in 2001, but that doesn't mean he accomplished all of his stated goals for the year. Winning those titles was supposed to help him get out of Edge's shadow, but it didn't help his cause much. Perhaps the way Christian went about it is to blame. In hindsight, maybe he shouldn't have attacked Edge at all. Instead, he should have followed Matt Hardy's example. Matt separated himself from his brother, Jeff, by taking singles matches while continuing to team with Jeff. He never displayed any animosity toward Jeff, even though it was Jeff and his swanton bomb that drew all the attention. Christian went the opposite route, and it backfired.

GRADE: C

HEALTH: Ladder matches, steel cage matches, and TLC matches couldn't keep Christian away. He might have taken a night or two off after matches of that sort, but those nights off were gifts from WWF management for working so hard; Christian didn't ask for them.

GRADE: B

CREATIVITY: Was joining the Alliance a creative way for Christian to establish himself as a singles wrestler? Christian might think so, but we don't. It was an easy way out. Delivering one-man *con-chair-tos* to Edge's skull doesn't earn him many points, either. But when it comes to in-ring promos, he's still one of the WWF's best at ribbing the fans in attendance. In that regard, he has few peers. When other heels just yell and scream, Christian taunts and teases—and does so with flair.

GRADE: B

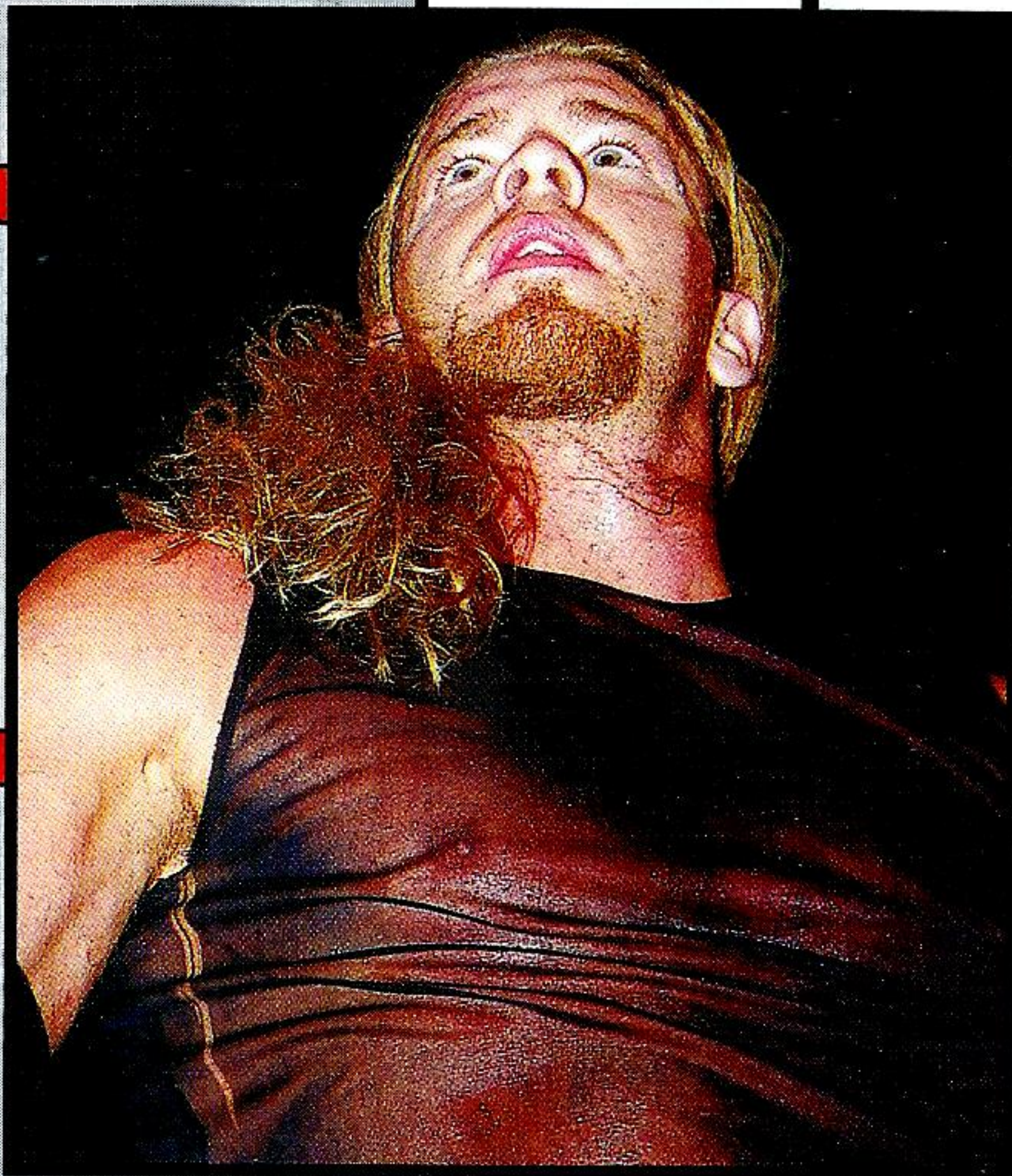
MARKETABILITY: "Chris-tian! Chris-tian!" Our ears don't start bleeding when Christian's intro music cues up, but sometimes we wish they would. At least then we'd be able to sue the creator of that god-awful tune. It works, though. Whenever we feel like Christian might be getting a raw deal from us, that intro music reminds us that, yes, he is a jerk. Just like X-Pac, who has been despised by WWF fans for years now, Christian is an old-school heel.

GRADE: B

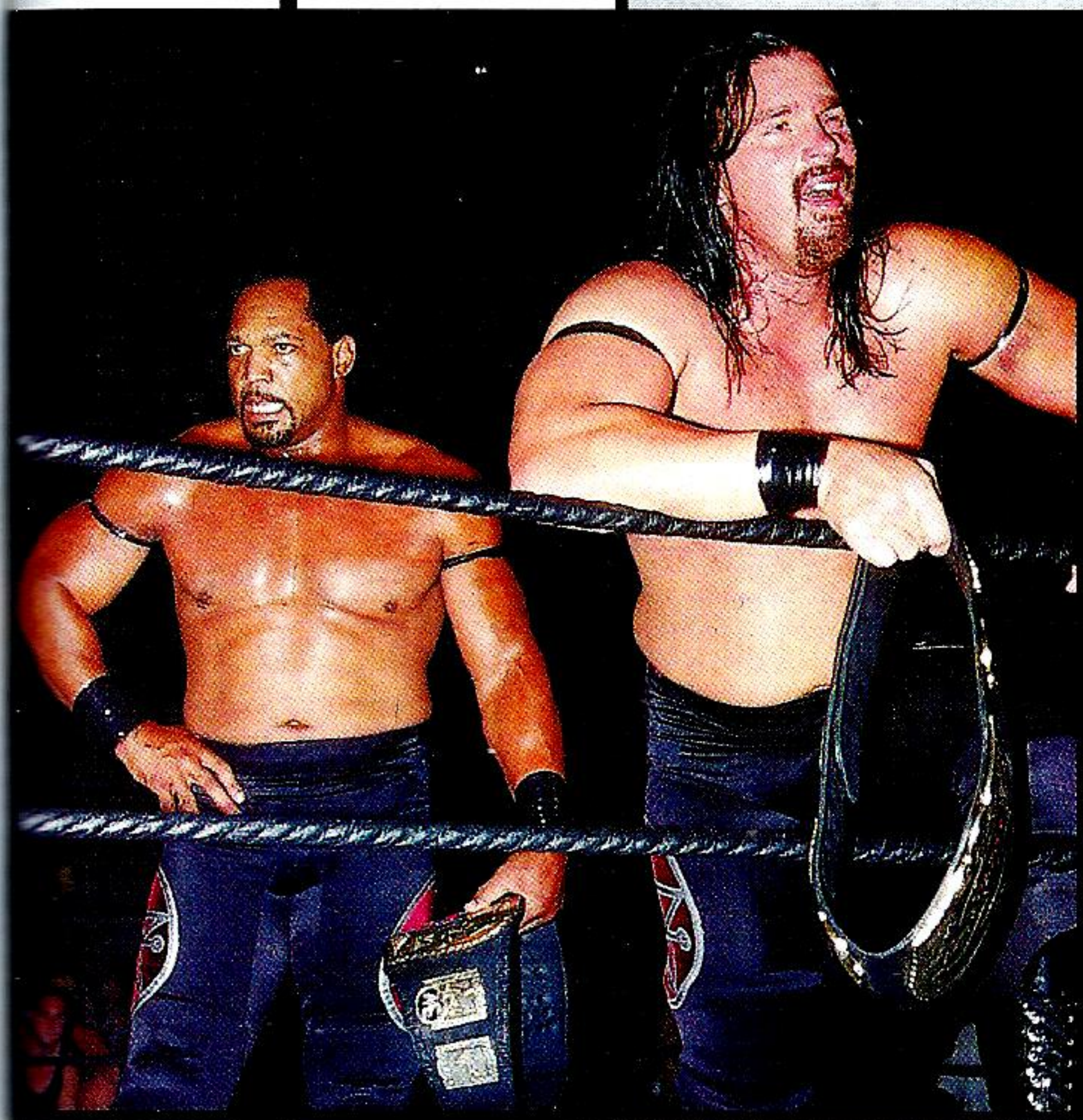
CAREER GROWTH: Remaining tight with Edge would have been the smarter move, but at least Christian is starting to create his own niche. Unfortunately, his niche could turn out to be that of a light heavyweight, because in the WWF, light heavyweights don't receive the respect they deserve. However, his jump to the Alliance did him *some* good, as did his reigns as Intercontinental and European champion. We wished he had gone about it differently, but Christian's career did benefit to an extent in 2001.

GRADE: B

REPORT CARD



THE ACOLYTES



REPORT CARD

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Faarooq and Bradshaw weren't interested in winning titles or receiving accolades. They were more concerned with collecting their paychecks and drinking as much beer as possible in the process. When it mattered, though, they rallied the WWF's troops. When the Alliance started its invasion, they worked hard to keep the locker room in order. Their leadership provided the company with some much-needed stability. Most will scoff at this idea, but if it wasn't for the APA motivating their fellow WWF wrestlers, the Alliance might have walked all over the WWF.

GRADE: A

HEALTH: Bradshaw and Faarooq don't wrestle on every *Raw* and *Smackdown*, but they do wrestle virtually every weekend on the house show circuit—and they don't just wrestle ... they fight. Their matches are measured explosions of violence. It's one of the reasons that nagging injuries keep Bradshaw and Faarooq sidelined from time to time.

GRADE: B

CREATIVITY: The APA don't put much thought into their matches. They just go out and beat the tar out of whomever is on the opposite side of the ring. Most of the time, winning their matches just happens. It's not like they're backstage reviewing videotape and planning out match strategy. The APA's true creative talents happen before and after the matches, when the beer drinking and card playing take place.

GRADE: C

MARKETABILITY: The fans love the APA. Faarooq and Bradshaw are the WWF's representation of the classic Hollywood cowboy. They're like two modern-day John Waynes, tough men who can hold their beer and come out of a bar fight virtually unscathed. The APA's image, though, prevents the WWF from marketing them to the masses. Heroes who participate in drunken bar fights would draw the ire of too many governmental and watchdog organizations.

GRADE: C

CAREER GROWTH: In July, they captured the WWF World tag team title by defeating The Dudley Boyz. They lost the belts one month later to Chris Canyon and "Diamond" Dallas Page. On October 22, Bradshaw defeated The Hurricane to win the WWF European title. Eight days later, Bradshaw dropped the strap to Christian in a match that was supposed to air on *Smackdown* but was edited out and moved to *Excess* because of time constraints. Does any of that mean anything? Absolutely not. Not when you're discussing the APA, anyway. Bradshaw and Faarooq are on the downslope of their respective careers. They're not looking for growth. They've had their time in the spotlight, and they know it's time to give back.

GRADE: B

THE BIG SHOW

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Show has been much maligned over the past few years. His critics have called him unmotivated and slow. In 2001, Show proved that he's none of the above—at least not anymore. The big man took off some weight and rededicated himself to getting in better shape. To an outsider, the results might not have been all that apparent, but to WWF insiders, the changes in Show were noticeable. The fact that he was added to Team WWF for the Survivor Series main event shows just how much faith Vince McMahon and other WWF officials now have in him. Show's career is back on track, and that's what he wanted for 2001.

GRADE: B

HEALTH: It's kind of difficult to injure a 7'2", 480-pound giant, even if you're a professional wrestler. Show also didn't take a whole lot of chances by employing dangerous, high-risk maneuvers (big surprise). Show was so healthy, he probably never even saw the inside of the trainer's room in 2001.

GRADE: A

CREATIVITY: Show spent most of 2001 in a rut, otherwise known as working one's way back up the ladder. His return at the Royal Rumble was a bit of a surprise—and his addition to the Survivor Series main event was an absolutely huge surprise. Show spent much of the time in between proving himself to WWF officials and his fellow wrestlers. Already involved in a very private image makeover, he probably didn't want to pursue a second more public makeover at the same time. Still, a character change would have served him well.

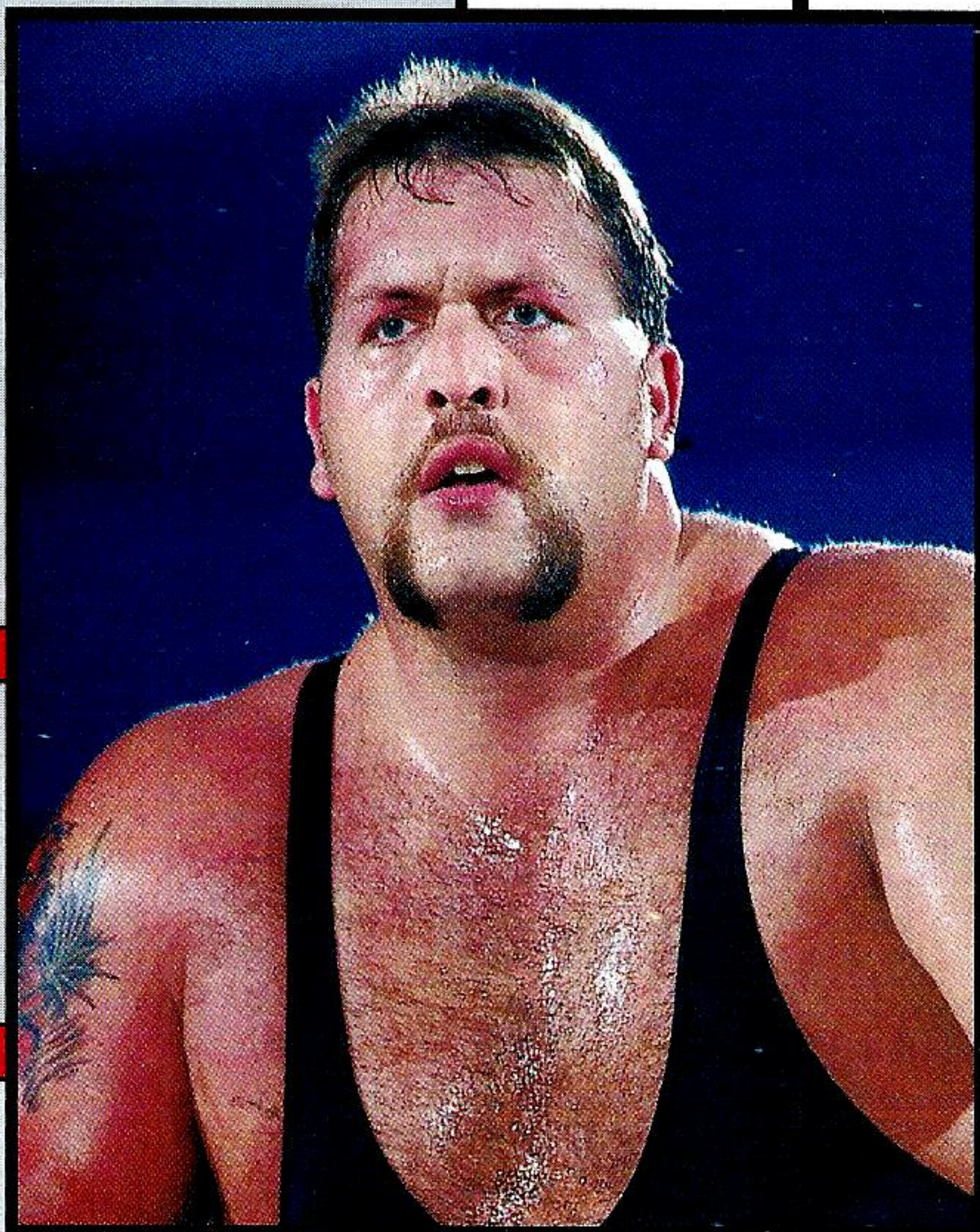
GRADE: C

MARKETABILITY: The WWF should be able to make a mint off Show. Fed officials certainly thought so in 1999, when they signed him to an almost unheard of 10-year contract. So far, he's been a big letdown, though it's not all his fault. Teaming with little men like Tajiri and Spike Dudley for no apparent reason didn't do his career much good. (Whose idea was it to dress Spike in a replica of Show's singlet, anyway?)

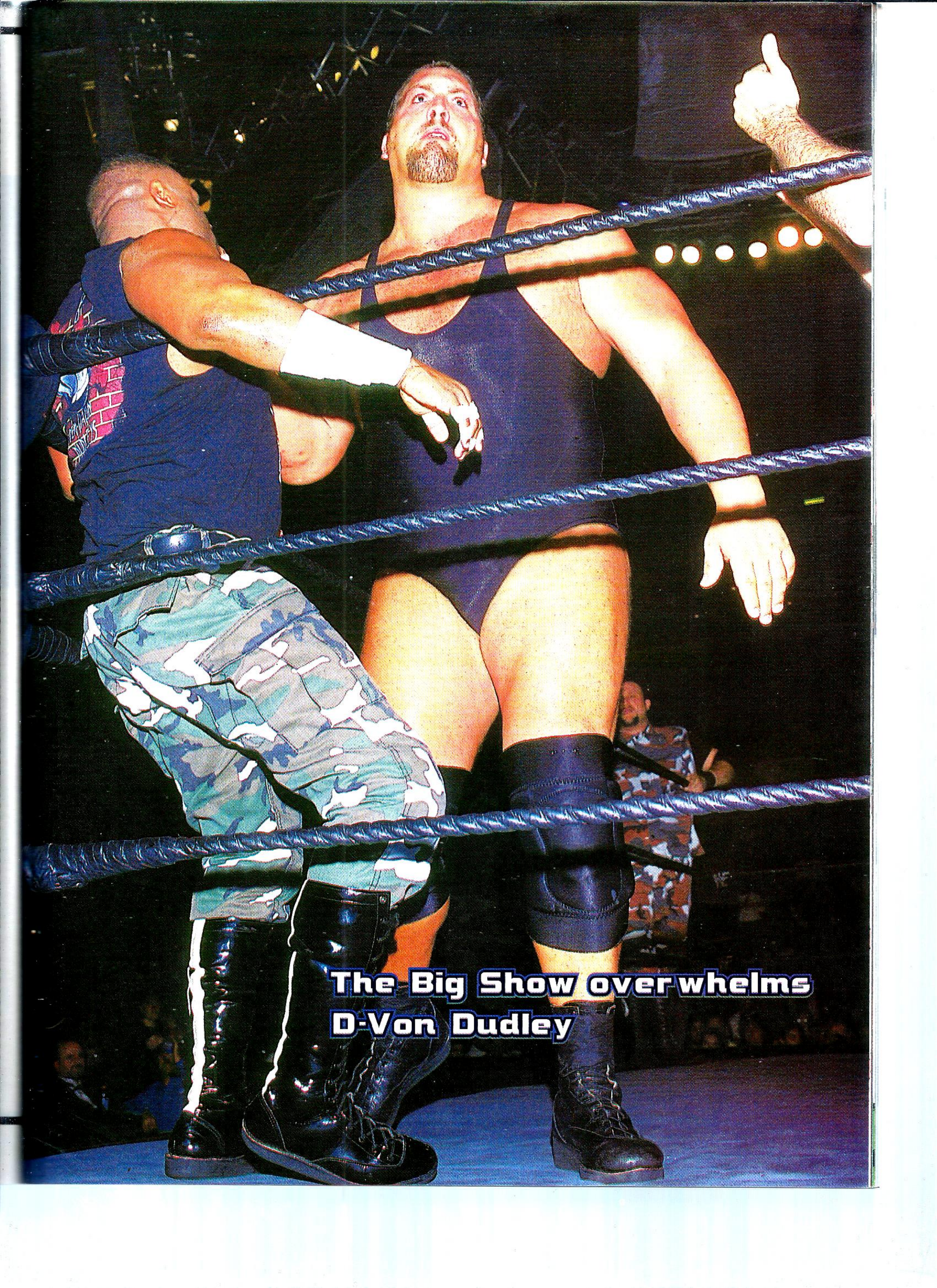
GRADE: C

CAREER GROWTH: Considering Show started 2001 as a member of Ohio Valley Wrestling (a WWF developmental territory), his career saw significant growth. The Fed has some faith in him again, and by most accounts, it's deserved. The former WWF and WCW champion isn't where most thought he would be at this stage of his career, but he's a heck of a lot better off at the end of 2001 than he was at the end of 2000.

GRADE: B



REPORT CARD



**The Big Show overwhelms
D-Von Dudley**

ROB VAN DAM

REPORT CARD

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Rob Van Dam was without full-time work shortly after the year began. ECW, his long-time home, folded, and an expected deal with WCW was dead after Fusient Media Ventures pulled out of negotiations to buy the promotion. Landing a job with the WWF didn't look like a sure thing, either. Van Dam was a part of a brief, half-hearted WWF/ECW angle in 1997, and WWF officials were said to have quickly soured on him. There was even talk that RVD had personally offended Vince McMahon. Despite all of that, Van Dam became one of the sport's most popular stars in 2001 (maybe even *the* most popular star.) From unemployed to the WWF's top tier sounds like superb goal achievement to us.

GRADE: A

HEALTH: Van Dam didn't suffer many health problems, even though he should have. With the way he wrestles, haphazardly throwing his body every which way, it's amazing that he didn't end the year as a broken down scrap heap of body parts. Jim Ross, the senior vice president of talent relations for the WWF, repeatedly (and publicly) stated that he wanted RVD to tone down his act, if not just for his own health, but the health of his opponents. Van Dam, however, continued to amaze as only he can—and he defied the injury gods while doing so.

GRADE: A

CREATIVITY: When it comes to actual wrestling, no one in the WWF was more creative than RVD. His every match was different, and he proved that he's able to successfully wrestle any man, regardless of size. He'll attempt maneuvers that even his most limber counterparts wouldn't even think of, let alone try. That's why, now more than ever, his old "Mr. Monday Night" nickname rings so true.

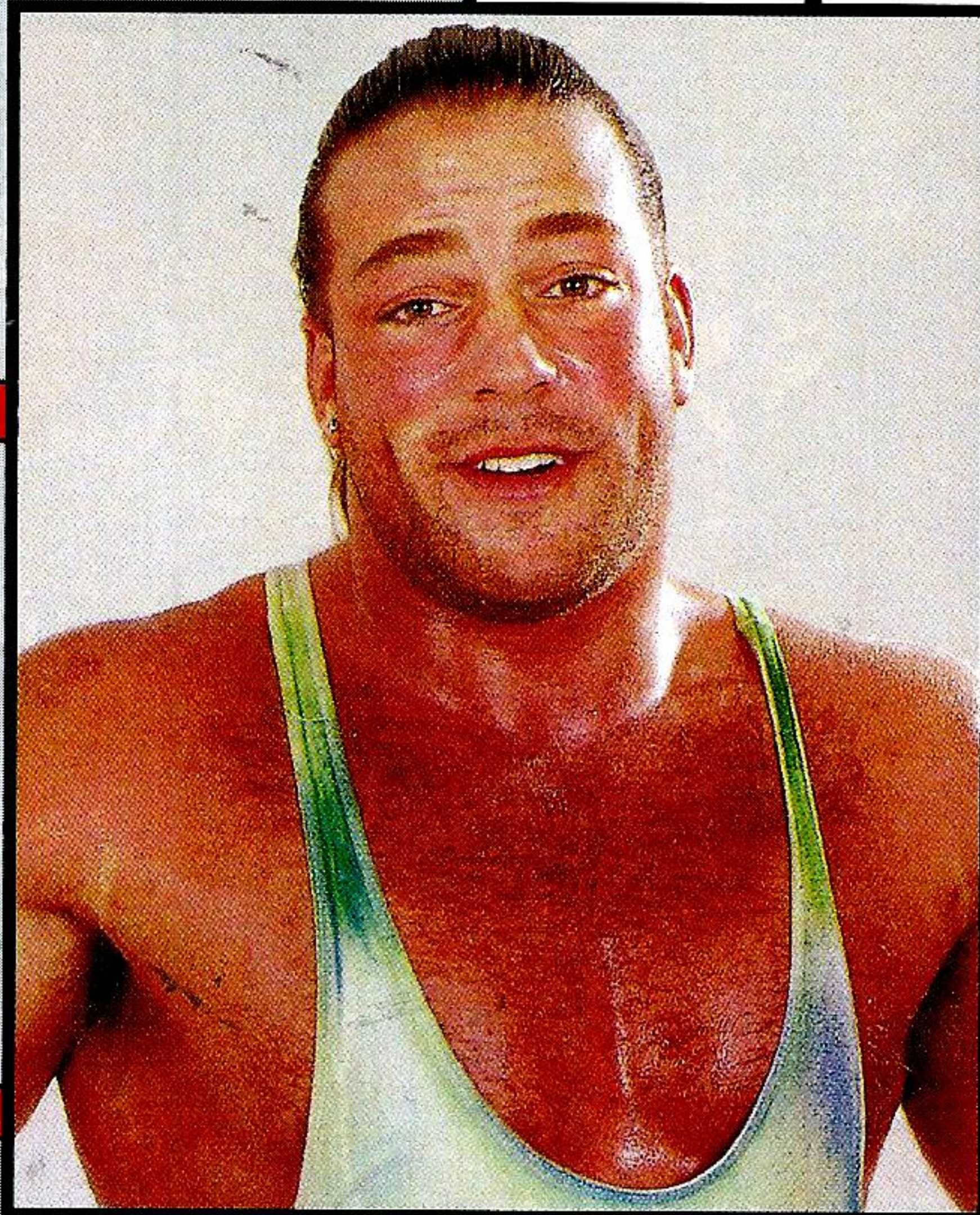
GRADE: A

MARKETABILITY: Van Dam is not your average professional wrestler. He has extraordinary talents, but he hasn't established much of a character. Other than his wrestling ability, the only other thing that makes him stand out is his overwhelmingly huge ego. RVD knows he's good, and he likes sharing that information at every given opportunity. Beyond that, however, he's bland, so he doesn't get extended time on the microphone. In a world of colorful characters, RVD's plain singlet and laid-back personality have the potential to get him lost in the mid-card. Fortunately, he's so good in the ring and is so laid-back and cool that he's become a star.

GRADE: C

CAREER GROWTH: He went from being a heralded, in-demand talent in a small pond (ECW) to being a heralded, in-demand talent in a vast ocean (the WWF). Need we say more?

GRADE: A



WILLIAM REGAL



GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Regal wasn't concerned with putting together an impressive win/loss record in 2001. He was too busy making rulings and booking matches to concern himself with such trivial matters. Besides, wielding as much power as humanly possible over your fellow wrestlers tends to skew your outlook. Commissioner is a role that Regal relishes because it comes with so much power. That's why he jumped to the Alliance. We're guessing that he knew Mick Foley was returning. He feared that he'd be asked to step down as WWF commissioner so Foley could resume that role. Sadly, Regal doesn't realize that the only people who truly wield power in the WWF are named McMahon.

GRADE: B

HEALTH: Regal was more of a politician than a wrestler in 2001. Thanks to long office hours and a limited number of high-profile matches, Regal didn't spend too much time in his physician's care. And if he did, no one noticed.

GRADE: A

CREATIVITY: No matter who was signing his paychecks, either the WWF or the Alliance, Regal could be counted on to make interesting rulings and matches. Also, the manner in which he guided Tajiri's career was downright intriguing. Regal turned Tajiri, who started out as a manservant of sorts, into one of the federation's most lethal weapons. Even the manner in which he revealed his allegiance to the Alliance was creative. If not for his interference, Kurt Angle would have beaten "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin to retain the WWF title and probably remained aligned with the WWF.

GRADE: B

MARKETABILITY: Regal's natural rudeness kept him from being marketable as the WWF commissioner, let alone as the Alliance commissioner. Regal couldn't even get a positive reaction from his own countrymen. Every time the WWF traveled to England for one of those U.K.-only pay-per-views last year, Regal was booed out of the country. His fellow Englishmen couldn't even stand him. So if Regal couldn't get himself over in England, how was he supposed to draw ratings and spike pay-per-view buy rates in the good ol' U.S. of A.?

GRADE: D

CAREER GROWTH: There was none, unless moving from the WWF to the Alliance qualifies as growth. That's probably fine with Regal. He's been too pampered and too coddled to return to a life of nightly bumps and bruises. As long as his career isn't going backward, he's happy with a commissioner's life.

GRADE: C

REPORT CARD

THE UNDERTAKER

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: If all he wanted to do in 2001 was remain a viable and integral part of the WWF, 'Taker performed very well. But if 'Taker actually wanted to remain in the WWF's top tier, he didn't exactly accomplish his goal. Sure, 'Taker remained a WWF cornerstone. After more than a decade of raising hell (or destruction, as he would put it), he proved once again in 2001 that he's still one of the biggest and meanest dogs in the yard. When dogs age, though, their bite diminishes in strength, even as their size remains the same. More than likely, 'Taker wanted to realize another reign as WWF champion this year. Seemingly, a title like that is no longer within his reach.

GRADE: B

HEALTH: Who can tell? 'Taker showed up ready to work in the ring probably 95 percent of the time this past year, but he wasn't always able to give it his all. The nagging injuries that he's accumulated over the years caught up with him. Although they didn't always prevent him from stepping through the ropes, they affected him. The effort was still there, but he was slower and more methodical than in years past, which is why he started to draw comparisons to Kevin Nash.

GRADE: C

CREATIVITY: Let's see ... there was a whole lot of teaming with Kane in 2001. We guess that's better than feuding with his half-brother for the millionth time, so we'll give him a pass there. Until one or the other leaves the sport for good, they're always going to have *something* to do with each other, whether we like it or not. But 'Taker didn't do the one thing that we would have liked to see him do this year: He should have introduced Kimberly, "Diamond" Dallas Page's wife, into his feud with DDP. *That* would have been creative.

GRADE: C

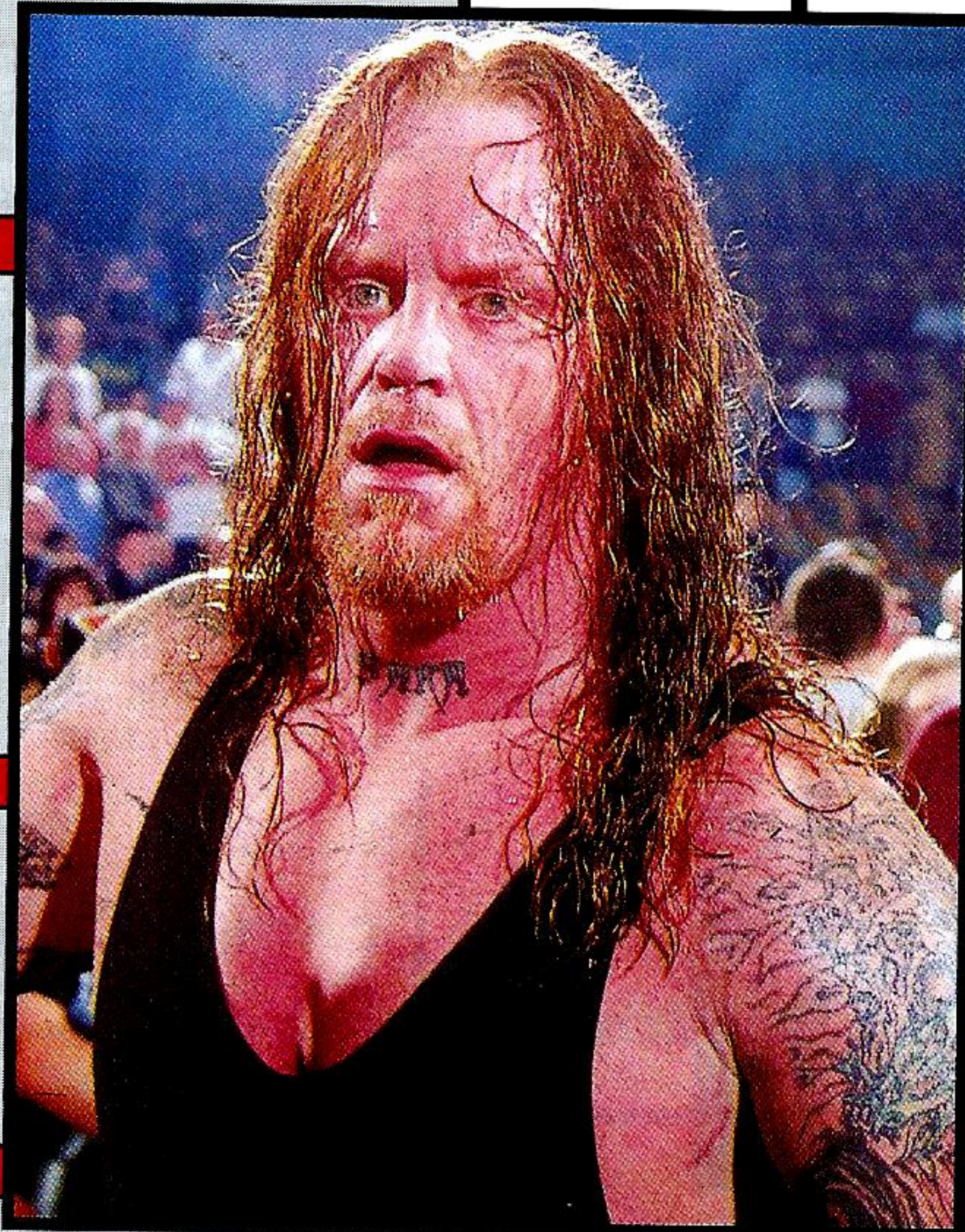
MARKETABILITY: Despite his "Under-neck" motif, 'Taker remained a WWF icon. His biker gimmick, while not exactly inspiring, freshened up his image. Maybe now Undertaker fans can wear his Dead Man Inc. T-shirts without having to worry about getting lumped in the same group as Dungeons & Dragons players. Also, we doubt that there's a Limp Bizkit song that would match 'Taker's sorcerer gimmick of a few years back.

GRADE: B

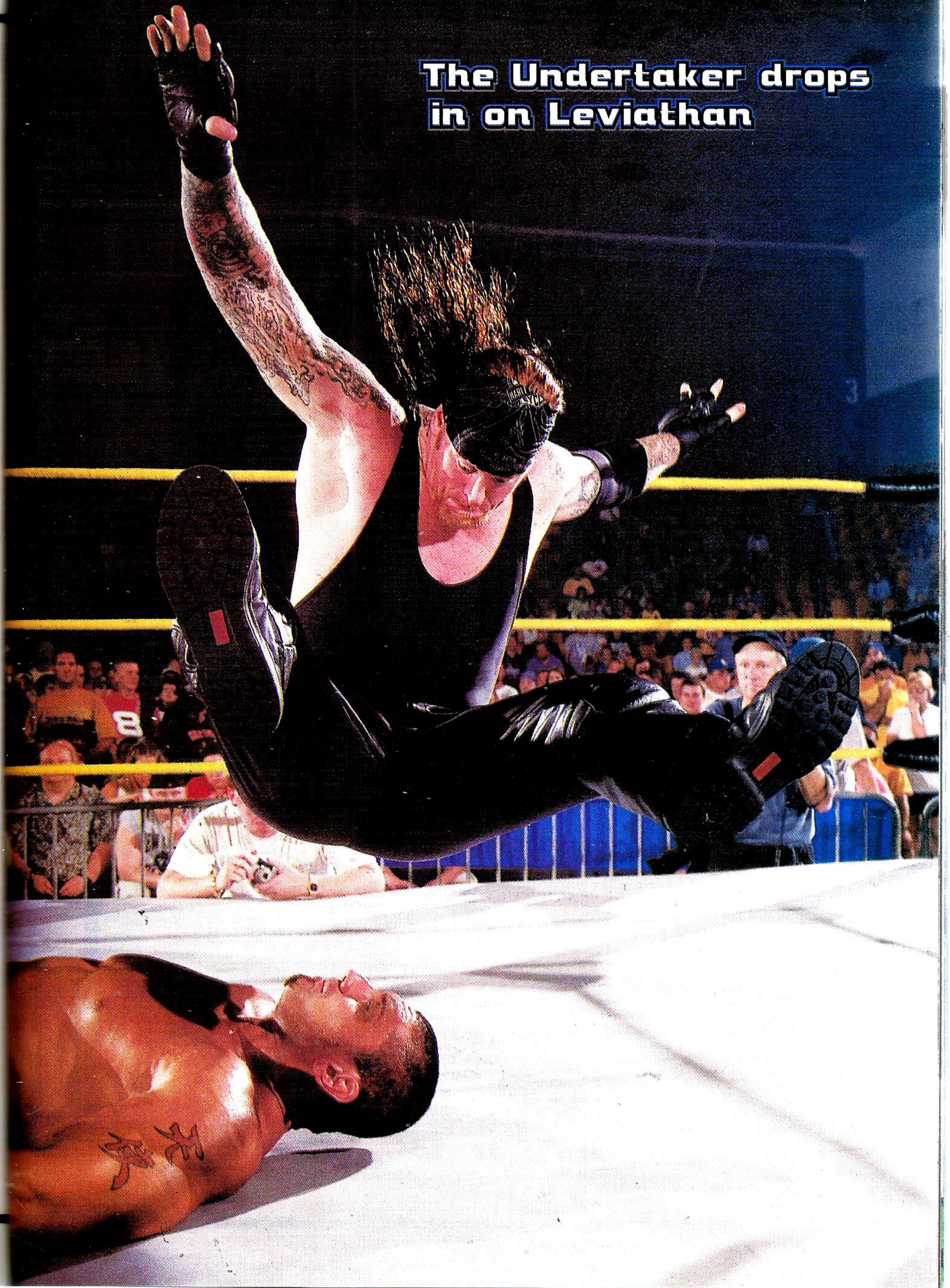
CAREER GROWTH: When you've been around as long as 'Taker has and seen as many highs as he's seen, there's nowhere to go but down. In 2001, he was a top tier WWF competitor by default—and that default status might not last a whole lot longer. Hulk Hogan, 'Taker is not.

GRADE: C

REPORT CARD



**The Undertaker drops
in on Leviathan**



CHRIS JERICHO

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: We'll admit it: After Y2J failed to grab the WWF title during his three-way feud with "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin and Chris Benoit this summer, we weren't sure he'd ever win the big one. He had come so close so many times that we figured frustration would turn to apathy and that Jericho would fade away into the mid-card ranks for good. Thank goodness for the WCW title. Even if he never wins it again (or never wins the WWF title), Jericho can now say that he has been a world champion. That monkey is finally off his back—and that's what he wanted to accomplish in 2001 most of all.

GRADE: A

HEALTH: Despite his tendency to go for high-risk maneuvers, Jericho's 2001 was practically injury-free. He had his bell rung a couple of times, so he should avoid taking head-first maneuvers for at least the foreseeable future, but other than that, he was nearly unbreakable, and he didn't miss any in-ring time.

GRADE: A

CREATIVITY: It's hard to believe that Jericho, who once ridiculed Dean Malenko by making fun of his deceased father, Boris, would become so bland in the creativity department. Every time we even think he's going to deliver another "Shut the hell up!" we quickly put the TV on mute. That phrase is tired and boring, and there's nothing creative about it at all. Let's hope the darker side that we've been seeing lately will inspire Jericho. We miss seeing the underdog in him.

GRADE: C

MARKETABILITY: Even if Jericho didn't officially join the WWF's top tier until this fall, he's been one of the federation's most marketable stars since his 1999 debut. The fans' reluctance to boo him is actually a tribute to how marketable the guy really is. How many other wrestlers have the fans refused to turn against over the years? Not too many. In terms of merchandise sales, he's probably within the WWF's top five. Jerichoholics are a special breed; most have to buy everything that Y2J and the WWF machine churn out.

GRADE: A

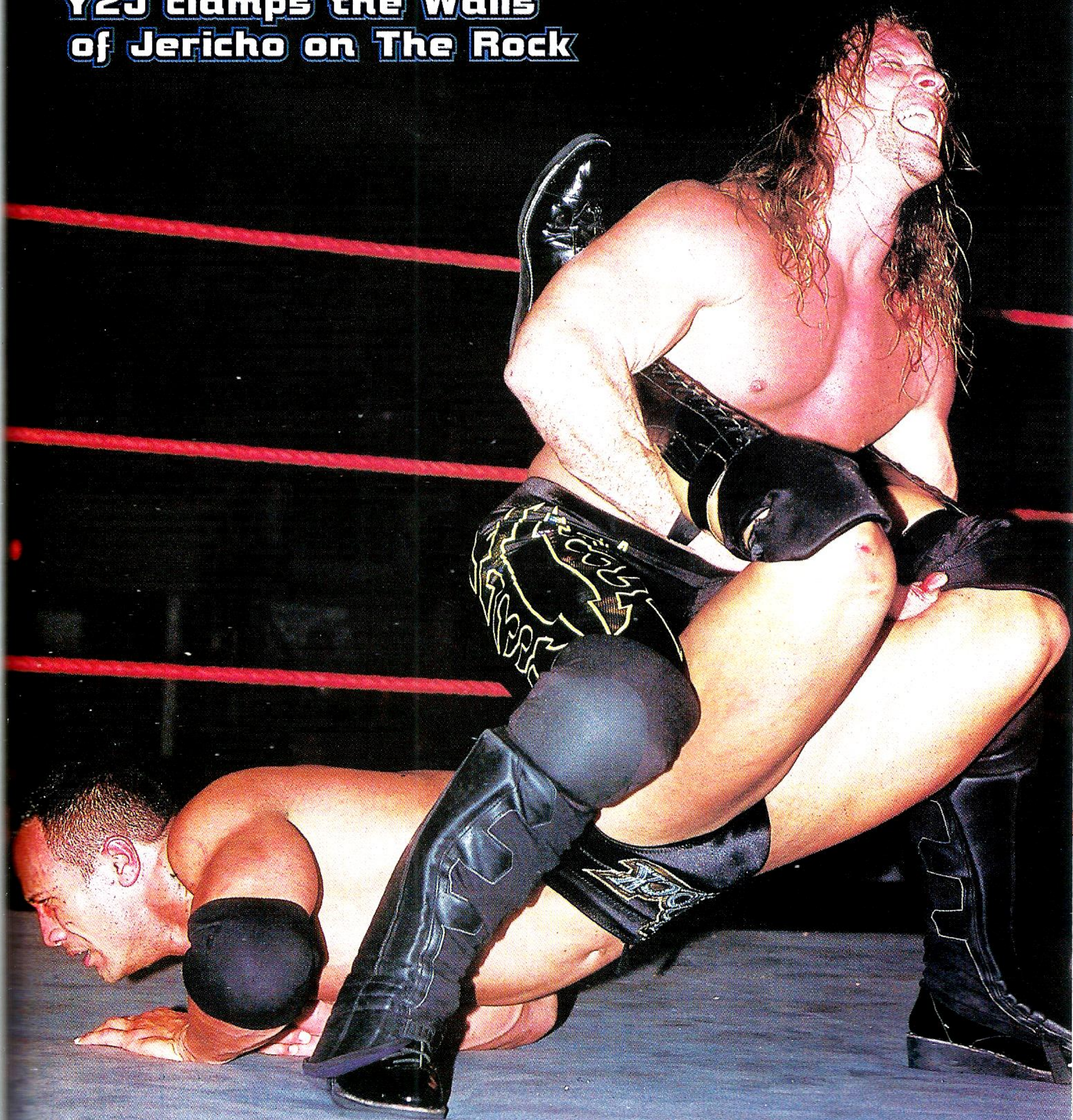
CAREER GROWTH: If he hadn't won the WCW World title from The Rock, Jericho would have received a miserable grade for this category. But he did win the title, and that win opened up avenues that weren't previously there. We weren't sure where he was headed as of press time, but a permanent slot among the top tier certainly looked like a strong possibility. Chris Jericho arrived in 2001.

GRADE: A



REPORT CARD

**Y2J clamps the Walls
of Jericho on The Rock**



BOOKER T

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Booker T's goals changed drastically once the WWF bought WCW. But when Booker made the choice to accept a buyout of his Time Warner contract and sign with the WWF, he did so because he wanted to prove himself to WWF management immediately. Injuring "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin on the night he debuted in the Fed didn't go over too well, but that was eventually forgiven. Over time, Booker established himself as one of the few WCW wrestlers worth investing in and earned the respect of every WWF wrestler on the roster.

GRADE: A

HEALTH: Booker had a lot of time to let old wounds heal after the WWF bought WCW. The final *Nitro* was held on March 26, and Booker didn't debut until June 24 at the King of the Ring pay-per-view. Three months to heal nicks, cuts, and bruises? No wonder Booker was the picture of health for much of the year.

GRADE: B

CREATIVITY: Pushing Booker as the legacy of WCW didn't work when he debuted with the Fed. WWF fans hated everything WCW before the sale, and they hated everything WCW after the sale, including Booker T. So Booker T changed. He put the proud WCW Booker T to rest and became the goofy (yet still quite talented and entertaining) Booker T we know today. It's funny how creativity sometimes comes shining through when it absolutely must. We could have done without the lousy Rock impersonation, though.

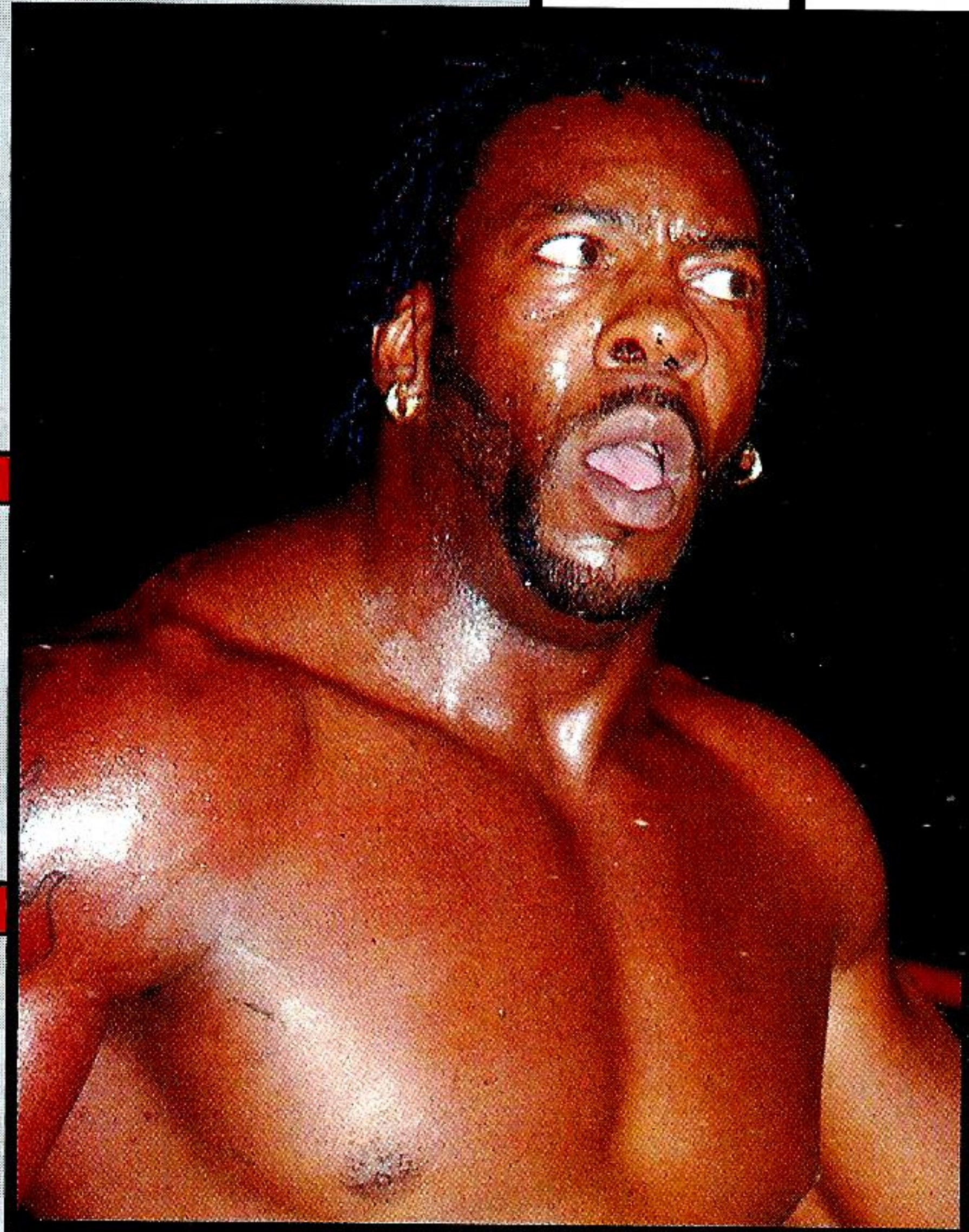
GRADE: B

MARKETABILITY: Booker T should call former WCW color commentator Mark Madden every day and thank him for getting the word "spinnerooni" over. When Madden coined that term, who ever would have thought that Booker would use it to shill for Chef Boyardee on *Raw* and *Smackdown*? Booker's silly character limited what the WWF could do with him commercially, but that's apt to change.

GRADE: B

CAREER GROWTH: When the WWF bought WCW, three men were carrying the promotion: Jeff Jarrett, Scott Steiner, and Booker T. All three men, in their own ways, were dominant champions. Before the sale, Booker was possibly on his way to becoming one of the greatest WCW champions of all-time. Since the transaction went through, Booker has seen his profile increase tenfold thanks to WWF TV, but he's not what he once was. It's even arguable that he's been a top tier performer for the Fed. Sometimes, however, you have to take a step backward in the short term to take a step forward in the long term.

GRADE: C



REPORT CARD

THE DUDLEY BOYZ

REPORT CARD

REPORT CARD

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: While Edge and Christian and The Hardy Boyz decided to pursue singles careers in some form or another, The Dudley Boyz concentrated on being the best damn tag team they could be. In doing so, they quite possibly became the greatest tag team of the last 10 years, if not more. Together, Buh Buh Ray and D-Von have captured eight ECW tag titles, five WWF tag titles, and one WCW tag title. That sure looks like the resume of one of the greatest tag teams ever to us.

GRADE: A

HEALTH: The Dudley Boyz' health virtually never comes into question. In 2001, they were too busy 3D-ing people through tables to let injuries get in their way.

GRADE: A

CREATIVITY: A lot of people figured that when The Hardy Boyz and Edge and Christian stopped teaming on a full-time basis, The Dudley Boyz would just up and disappear due to a lack of competition. Not quite. The Dudley's didn't need strong competition to keep their competitive juices flowing. If Edge and Christian and the Hardys weren't available to serve as table fodder, the Dudleys proved that they were more than happy to put random folk like The Rock or Chris Jericho through furniture. It doesn't matter to them. That's why they're so dangerous.

GRADE: B

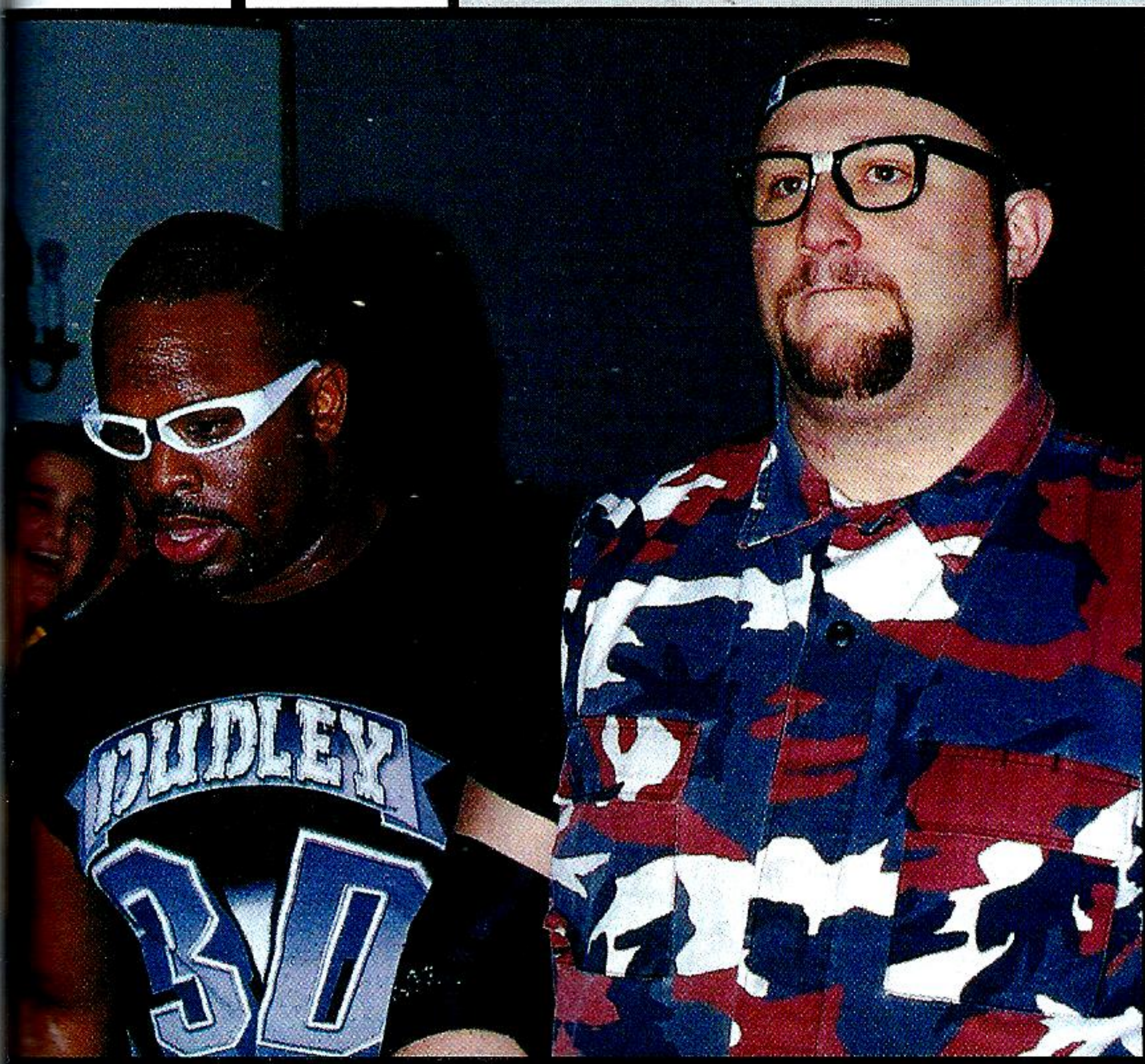
MARKETABILITY: Buh Buh Ray and D-Von can be as creative as Vincent Van Gogh, but their lack of strong competition did hurt them. Everything was just too easy for them, and wrestling fans don't like easy. In fact, wrestling fans would rather see two so-so teams compete in a hotly contested match than watch a great team squash a weaker team every night. Unless you're a sadist, there's just no fun in a match like that. Fortunately for them, the Dudleys are sadists.

GRADE: C

CAREER GROWTH: It looks like 2001 was the year that The Dudley Boyz established themselves as an all-time great team. Last year alone, Buh Buh Ray and D-Von captured four WWF tag team titles, plus their first and only WCW tag team title. Singles competition doesn't seem to be on their agenda, either. If it is, it's at the very bottom of their list of priorities. They seem-

ingly have no desire to split. Of course, if the Dudleys experience a similar year like this next year, we'll probably call them stale. But 2002 is just getting started, so we'll just call them the best tag team alive right now.

GRADE: A



THE RETURN OF RIKISHI... AND HIS 800-POUND SECRET WEAPON!

**The Dudleys? The Acolytes? The McMahons?
Rikishi could handle any of them if two 400-pound
relatives accompany him back to the WWF**

By Harry Burkett

RIKISHI HAS SPENT a significant amount of time reflecting on his career during the past six months. He hasn't had much choice. Rikishi injured his shoulder during a match against Kurt Angle during a May edition of *Raw* and was diagnosed with a torn labrum. The severity of the injury, which required surgery, was compared to the shoulder injury suffered by Billy Gunn a couple of years ago. There's never a convenient time for a career-threatening injury, but in Rikishi's case, a timeout wasn't necessarily a bad thing.

"Brother, I just didn't know where I was going," said Rikishi, who had stopped by the Heartland Wrestling Association training center in Cincinnati to watch up-and-coming talent. "Worse than that, I don't think they knew where I was going."

"They," in this case, are the powers-that-be in the WWF. Rikishi's phenomenal run with Too Cool had established him as the company's hottest breakout star, preceding the rise of Kurt Angle by several months. Then came the "Who ran over 'Stone-Cold'?" mystery. Rikishi revealed himself as the surprise culprit.

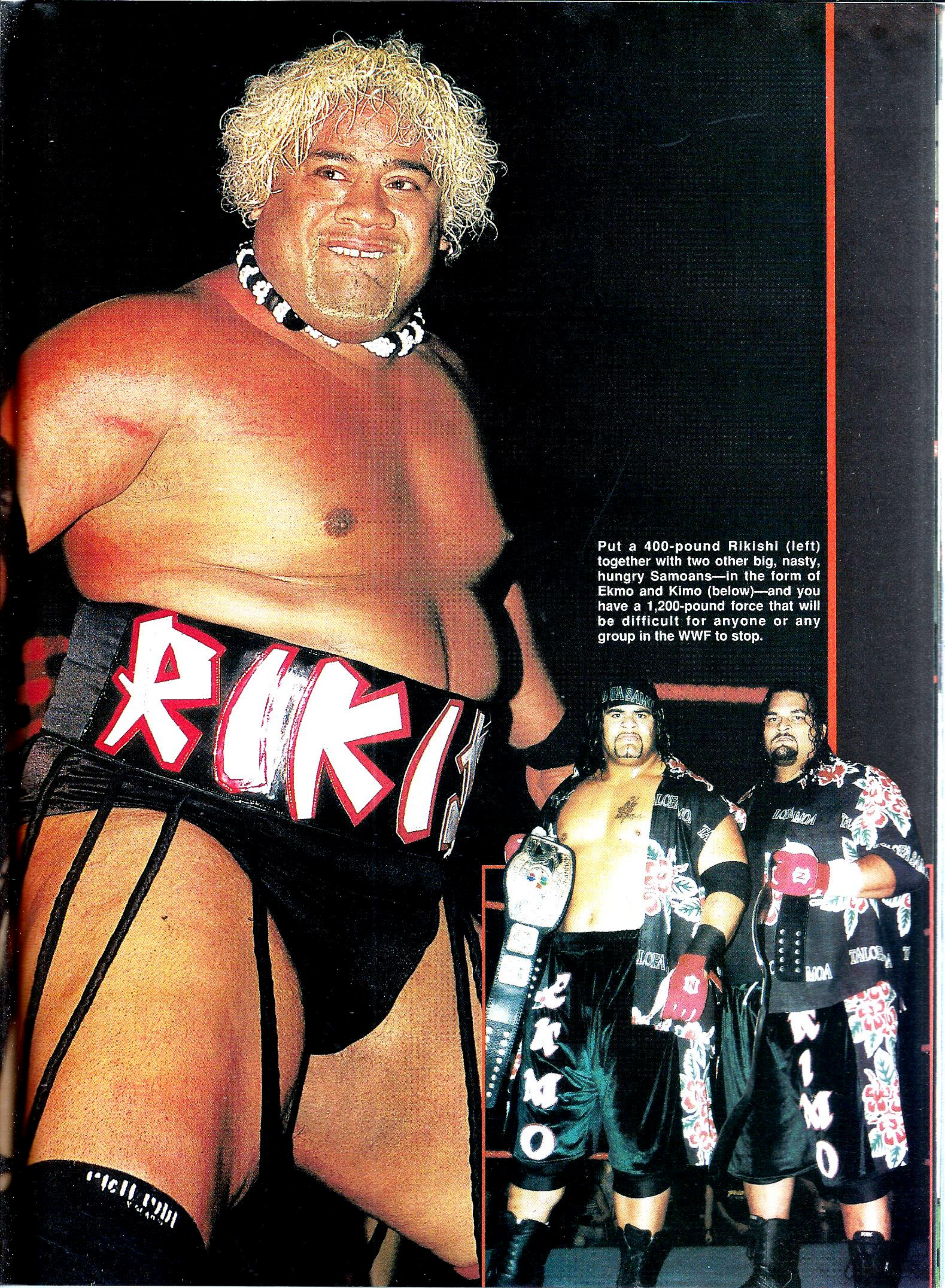
His heel heat turned ice-cold, however, as soon as Triple-H claimed to be the mastermind of the crime. Then it went from cold to frigid when he was paired with Haku. Rikishi's falling-out with the McMahons in May indicated another run as a fan favorite. A week later, the injury happened.

"I didn't want to quit, you know," said Rikishi. "I was in denial, didn't want to be taken out again, and the way I left, it just left everything up in the air. Now that the surgery's over and I've been hitting the gym more, I've been thinking about a good way to come back—something that would help my career and be special for my family, too."

The former Intercontinental champ nodded toward the ring, where Ekmo and Kimo—billed as The Island Boys—were hitting the ropes with a couple of sparring partners. Like The Island Boys, Rikishi is a member of the extended "Samoan" wrestling family. The Anoa'i branch is the most famous, headed by Afa and Sika. Kimo is Sika's son. Ekmo is Rikishi's brother.

"Hah-hah, just take one look at that mug and you know he's related to me," Rikishi said lightheartedly. "He's a big boy, too. There's no doubt in my mind that he'll be a big-time WWF superstar someday. So will Kimo, but you

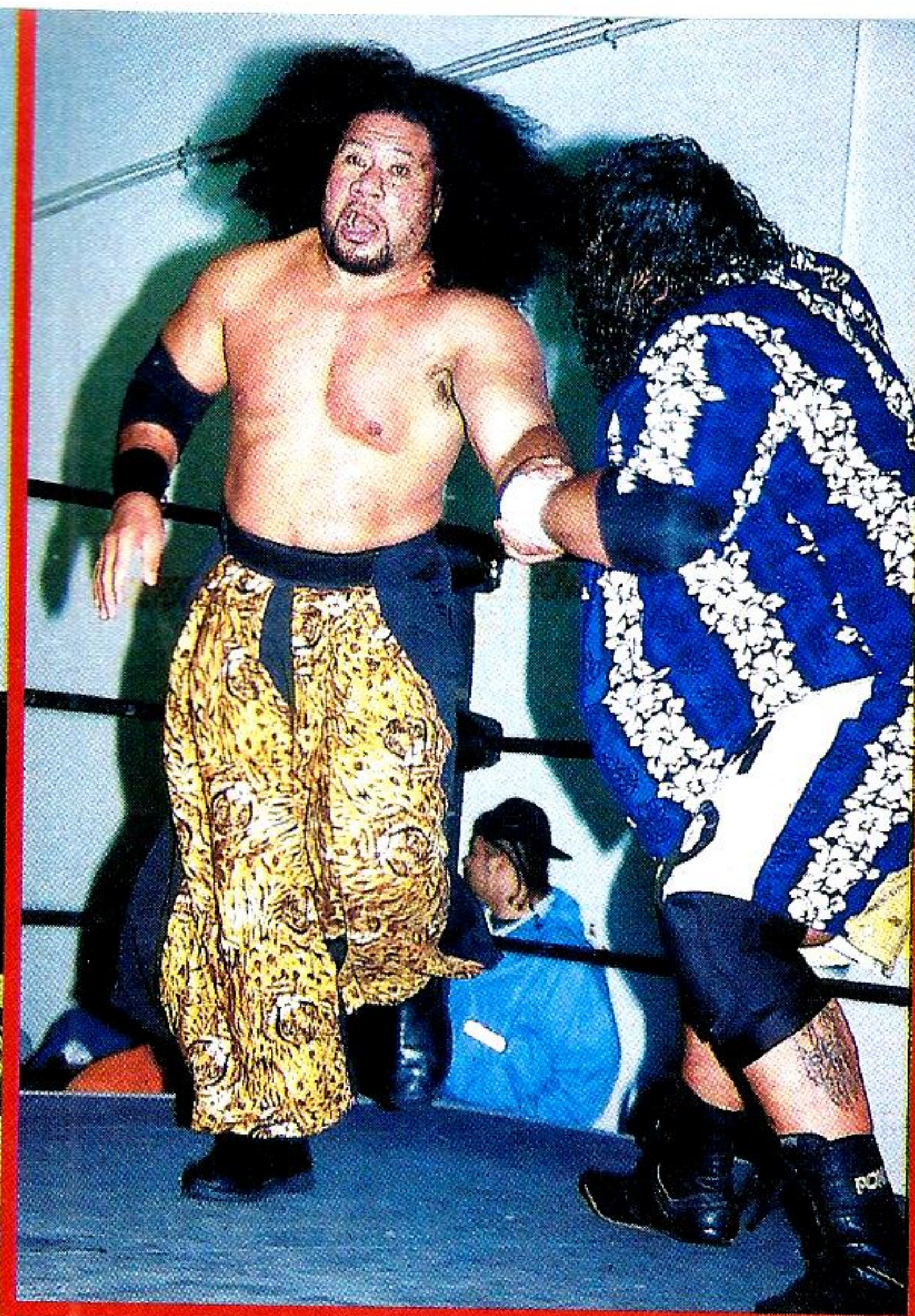




Put a 400-pound Rikishi (left) together with two other big, nasty, hungry Samoans—in the form of Ekmo and Kimo (below)—and you have a 1,200-pound force that will be difficult for anyone or any group in the WWF to stop.



Overpowering a cruiserweight like E.Z. Money is easy work for someone as large and strong as Ekmo. It'll be interesting to see if they'll ever get a shot at overpowering people in the WWF. They do already hold a big win over The Acolytes.



Kimo and Haku haven't been the closest of friends in the Heartland Wrestling Association, but just imagine a clique consisting of Rikishi, The Island Boys, and Haku. That'd be about 1,500 pounds of bad news for someone.

can't blame me for being partial to my little brother."

Handing down the tights and sharing wrestling knowledge is an important tradition in Rikishi's family. Taking a back bodydrop is almost a rite of passage.

"I took a lot of grief for criticizing the WWF and how they treated the jungle boys because that's how we were cast—as jungle boys," he said. "I like to think I took some steps to break that mold, and I think these boys will take it even further. The Rock is somebody Ekmo and Kimo can respect. But when you see Rock, you don't think Samoan. Ekmo and Kimo are gonna be in-your-face Samoan and they're gonna be too cool ... the *real* Too Cool."

Ekmo and Kimo are aware of the high expectations and, so far, they have gone a long way to fulfill them. Their feud with Russ and Charlie Haas over the MCW Southern tag team title was one of the most intense Memphis rivalries of 2000 and early-2001. The Island Boys and the brothers Haas were the only tag teams retained by the WWF when the company terminated its developmental



You don't find either Island Boy in this kind of position against much smaller foes too often. They're very strong men, but those who know them well are quick to compliment their speed and endurance, too.

deal with Memphis Championship Wrestling on June 20. They were transferred to the Heartland Wrestling Association in Ohio, where their feud continues.

"I don't know what it is about that family, but

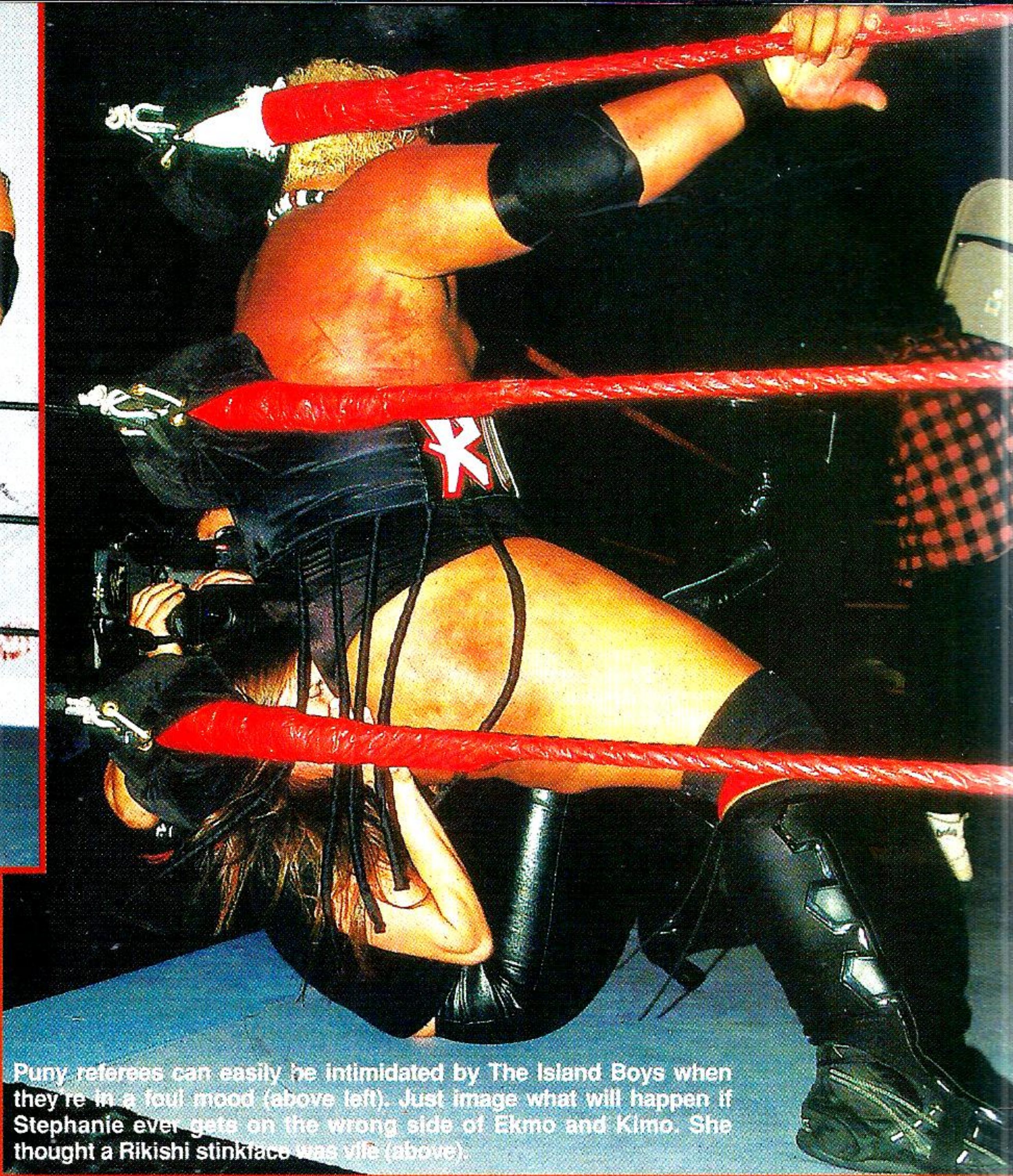


they are so athletically gifted," said Russ Haas, who once belonged to the Oklahoma Junior National freestyle wrestling team. "Their stamina and speed is so deceptive, especially when you consider how much bulk they're carrying around. I suppose that's why that family has had such great success over the years."

Seton Hall standout Charlie Haas agreed. "They're agile for their size, and that inclines you to believe it's genetic," he said. "I don't think that's all of it. Those guys put in a lot of hard work in the ring, and they might eat a lot, but they train and strive to be as fit, in a cardiovascular sense, as they can be. Russ and I have gone round and round with Ekmo and Kimo in Memphis, Ohio, Louisville—you name it. I'd like us to have it out in the WWF someday. I know those Island Boys are going to make it, and I hope we do, too."

But the gulf between developmental talent and WWF superstardom is more vast than ever. The WWF released many developmental wrestlers during the first half of 2001; much of the existing talent has already spent years in the system—and more cuts are likely to come. With so many former WCW and ECW stars aspiring for spots in the WWF, the prospects for this lost generation seem dim. How would The Island Boys fare against real WWF superstars? For example, could they beat The Acolytes?

Actually, they already have. They defeated Bradshaw and Faarooq for the Southern tag team



Puny referees can easily be intimidated by The Island Boys when they're in a foul mood (above left). Just image what will happen if Stephanie ever gets on the wrong side of Ekmo and Kimo. She thought a Rikishi stinkface was vile (above).

title in the obscurity of their Memphis backyard. Bradshaw and Faarooq won't forget it anytime soon, to be sure. If Memphis fans bought it, why wouldn't WWF fans?

"And Stephanie McMahon wants to talk about my big, oily ass?" joked Rikishi. "Why don't we just back up *three* asses to her and see what happens! Shoot, those McMahons are gonna be in a lot of trouble if I bring Ekmo and Kimo with me when I come back. Even if they don't think Ekmo and Kimo are ready, I'll be patient. Someday I'm gonna have two 400-pound Island Boys ready to back it up, if you know what I mean."

And what do The Island Boys think of Rikishi's plans? "I guess we have to go along with it," replied Ekmo. "There's no arguing with your big brother."

Kimo was more cautious. "Let me get this straight. Rikishi thinks the first thing we ought to do is a triple-stinkface on Stephanie, the boss' daughter? That doesn't sound too smart. But I guess that never stopped us before."

Ekmo and Kimo may question Rikishi's wisdom at times, but they know his heart is in the right place. Now The Island Boys want to reach their right place, at Rikishi's side in the WWF. □

STACY KEIBLER

"I'LL CHANGE THE WAY PEOPLE LOOK AT WOMEN'S WRESTLING FOREVER"

IF IT WASN'T for the fact that Stacy Keibler was only three years old when the song "Legs" hit the charts, you'd swear Z.Z. Top wrote it just for her. As her male fans everywhere will surely testify, Stacy most certainly has legs—perhaps the finest of any woman in the WWF—and, boy, does she know how to use all 41 inches of them.

Just ask Matt Hardy, who was so mesmerized by Stacy's looks that he accidentally cold-cocked his own girlfriend, Lita, during one recent match. That transgression nearly cost Hardy his relationship. Still, you can't be too hard on Matt. Like most men, he finds it difficult to look the other way whenever Stacy's showing off her body or using her womanly charms to her advantage.

Yet it seems Stacy's conceited attitude, not her stunning figure, is what's ticking off the other WWF divas. The former Baltimore Ravens cheerleader has a lot going for her, and she knows it. What's more, she has no problem reminding those other WWF divas, particularly Torrie and Lita, just how highly she thinks of herself.

And why shouldn't Stacy be brimming with confidence about her future in the WWF? She's every bit as gorgeous as she thinks she is, and she's gaining more in-ring experience with each passing week. Plus, having Buh Buh Ray and D-Von Dudley in her corner will boost Keibler's skills in the ring even more.

Senior Writer Frank Krewda re-

cently caught up with "The Duchess Of Dudleyville." As you'll notice, she was more than willing to open up about those long legs, her feuds with Torrie and Lita, and partnering up with The Dudley Boyz.

"Let's face it, with my size and skill, no woman in the WWF can handle me right now. And once the Dudleys get through training me, I'll be spitting nails."

Q: At the risk of setting a poor tone for this interview, let me say that you look even lovelier in person than you do on TV.

A: Well, thank you very much. I'm sure I do. And you know what they say—flattery will get you everywhere. Actually, I take that back. Flattery will get you everywhere with a skank like Torrie Wilson. My standards are a little bit higher than hers. You must know that by now.

Q: Is that a shot at Torrie or a shot at Tajiri?

A: It's not a shot at anybody. It's just a fact. Everybody saw the way Torrie just abandoned the Alliance so she could be with "The Japanese Jigsaw," or whatever he calls himself. Torrie doesn't need me to point out what a lowlife she is; she opened up all our

eyes to that, especially mine.

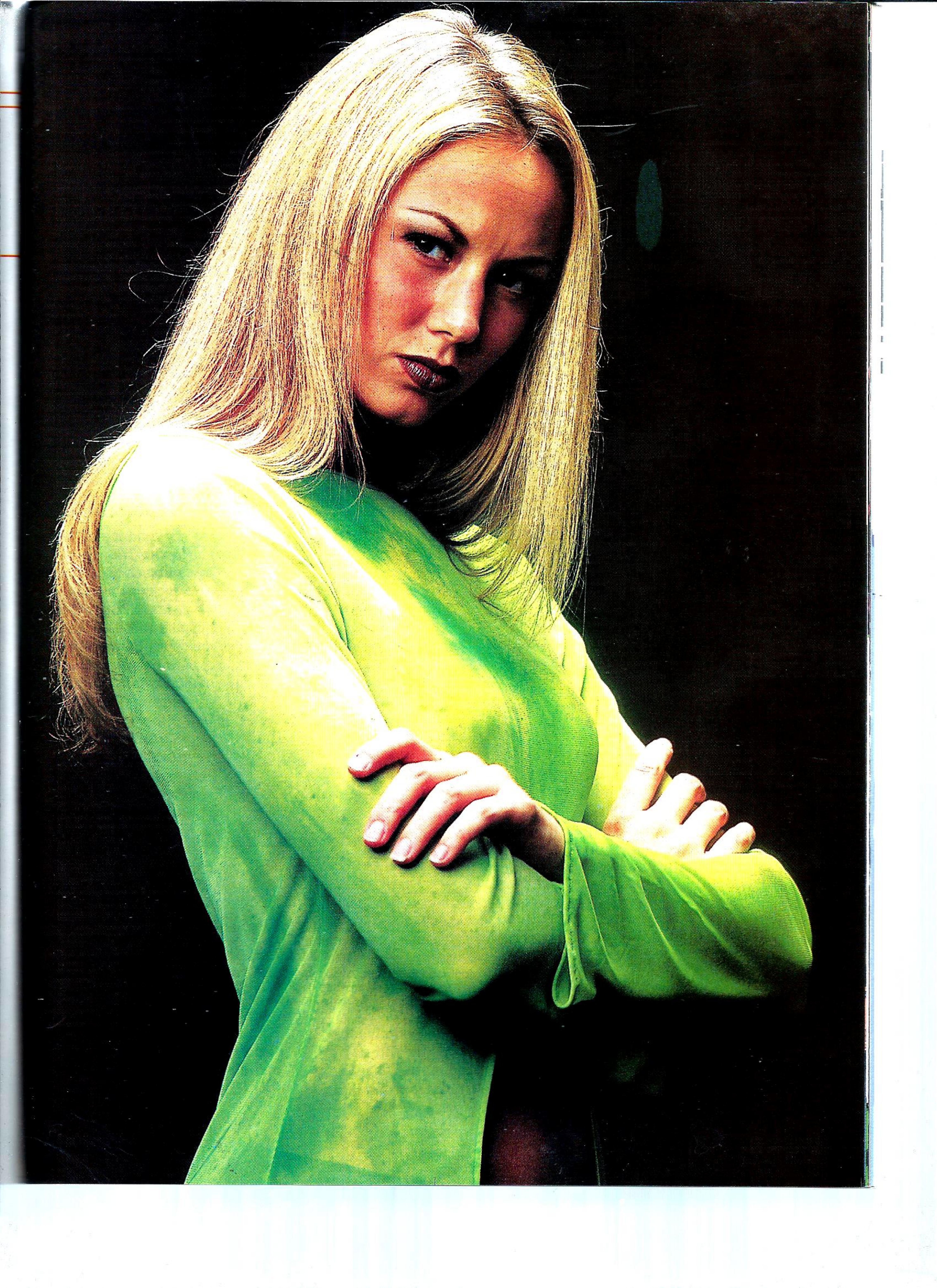
Q: You sound really disappointed Torrie jumped ship to the WWF. I mean, it must have been tough losing a friend like that after going through so much in WCW together and all ...

A: Ha! I was more disappointed in myself for hanging around with such a loser for so long. Believe me, I got tired of carrying her fat butt in the ring. I mean, look at that tag team bra and panties match we had against Trish and Lita at Invasion. Do you think anyone really wanted to see Torrie Wilson in her underwear? Please, you're making me sick! I heard that when Torrie lost her clothes, pay-per-view customers started calling their cable providers in record numbers, demanding a refund.

Q: Well, quite frankly, I don't think the sight of Torrie in her underwear is as bad as all that.

A: Is that so? I guess it's all about standards. Like I said, some people's are higher than others, Mr. Tajiri.

Q: I can't help but notice that you seem really stuck on the fact that Torrie and Tajiri are an item. In fact, it sounds a little bit like sour grapes. I mean, as beautiful as you are ... at least Torrie has a man. You don't appear to have anyone right now. Are you sure it was Torrie's move to the Alliance that caused





"Torrie was so envious of the attention that I was getting from everyone that she had to run out and grab the first guy who'd give her the time of day—even if it was Tokyo Standard Time."

the rift between you two?

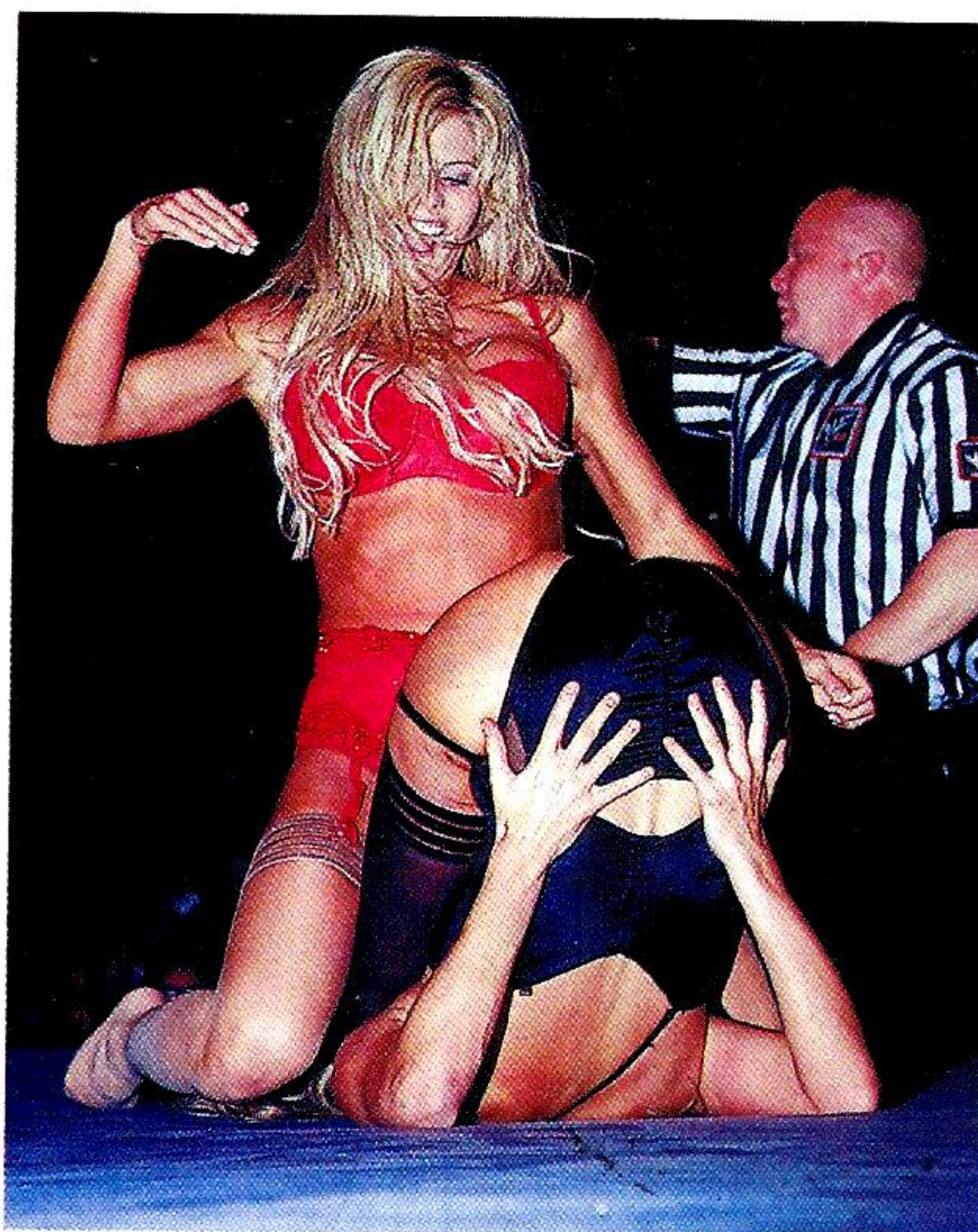
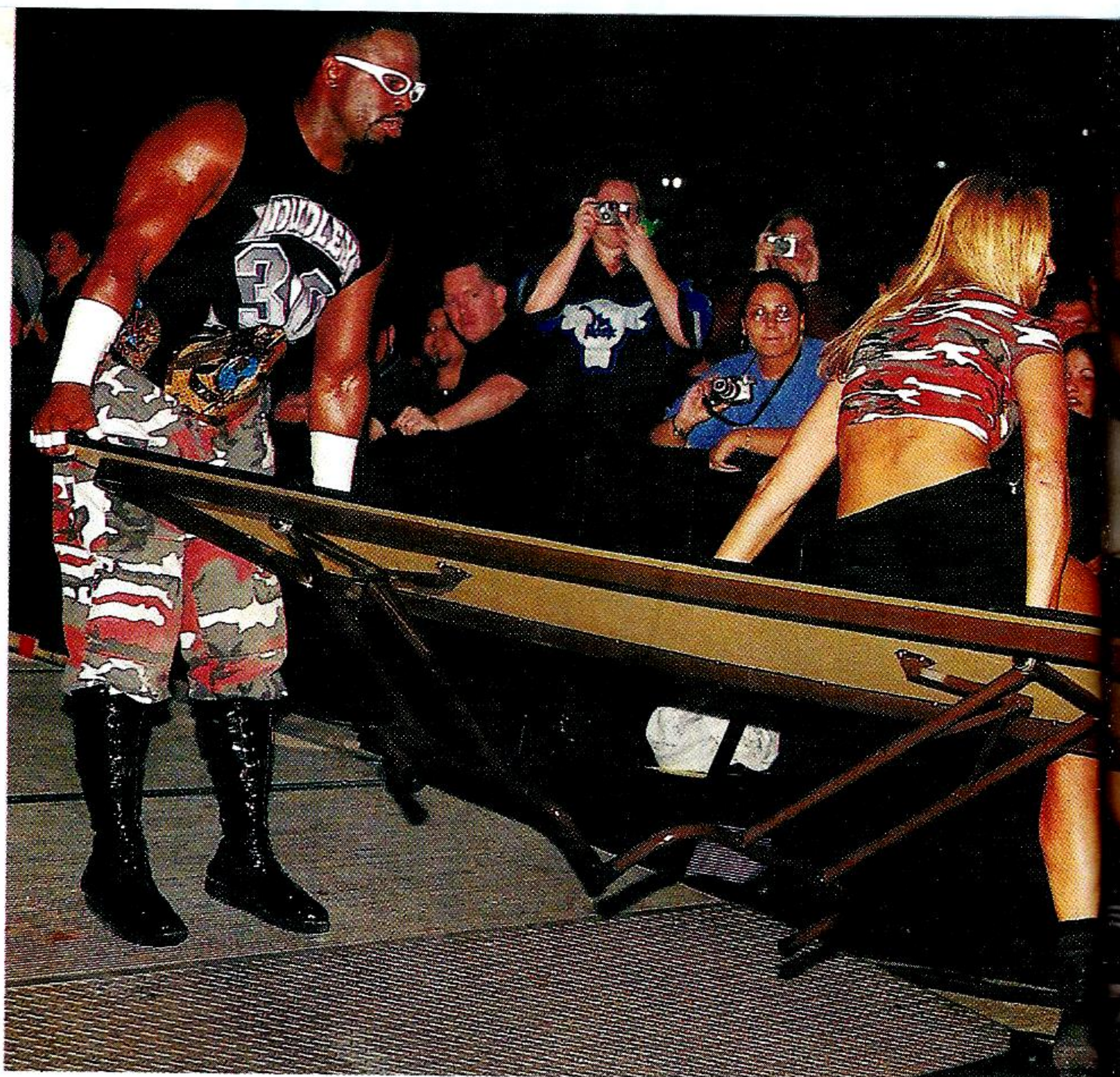
A: Yes, I'm sure. Well, it was that and Torrie's petty jealousy. It drove me crazy after a while. Torrie was so envious of the attention that I was getting from everyone that she had to run out and grab the first guy who'd give her the time of day—even if it was Tokyo Standard Time. Please, we've wasted enough time talking about Torrie and her precious little man. Trust me, I could take Tajiri from Torrie any time I felt like it. But I'm not into mediocre wrestlers. And besides, I can't imagine Tajiri being much of a man when it counts, if you know what I mean.

Q: What was it then that you saw in Tazz?

A: Tazz is a lot more of a man than Tajiri.

Q: Well, Tajiri more than held his own in the ring against Tazz. He beat him in the middle of the ring at Invasion, if I remember right.

A: Oh, I just wanted somebody to help me put Torrie in her place, all right?! Tazz helped me do it.



Stacy has nothing good to say about her former friend Torrie Wilson and says Torrie doesn't compare to her in anyway. But wasn't Torrie a little too much for her to handle at No Mercy?

It was a business kind of thing. You know what, I'm getting really bored talking about Tazz and Tajiri and Torrie. I'm so

beyond them right now. Change the subject.

Q: Okay, then how about Lita? How did the bad blood start between you two?

A: *(Sighs)* Jealousy again. Pure and simple. Look, Matt Hardy is a sucker for a pretty girl. All I have to do is look at him the right way or wiggle a little and it's like he's in a trance. It's not my fault Lita can't keep him happy. And it's not my fault if Lita can't handle her man. She tried to get back at me on *Raw*, but all I had to do was wiggle and jiggle a little bit and Matt actually knocked her out for me. Thank you, Matt, honey.



Stacy Keibler insists that her relationship with The Dudley Boyz benefits all involved. They must like her if they're willing to carry her to the ring on a table—and have shown no interest in putting her *through* one.

interest in my career because they need a real lady's presence in their corner. That's why I'm "The Duchess Of Dudleyville." And I need somebody with a no-nonsense approach to make me even meaner than I already am in the ring. Like I've said, their input is helping me already. Just ask Torrie or Lita.

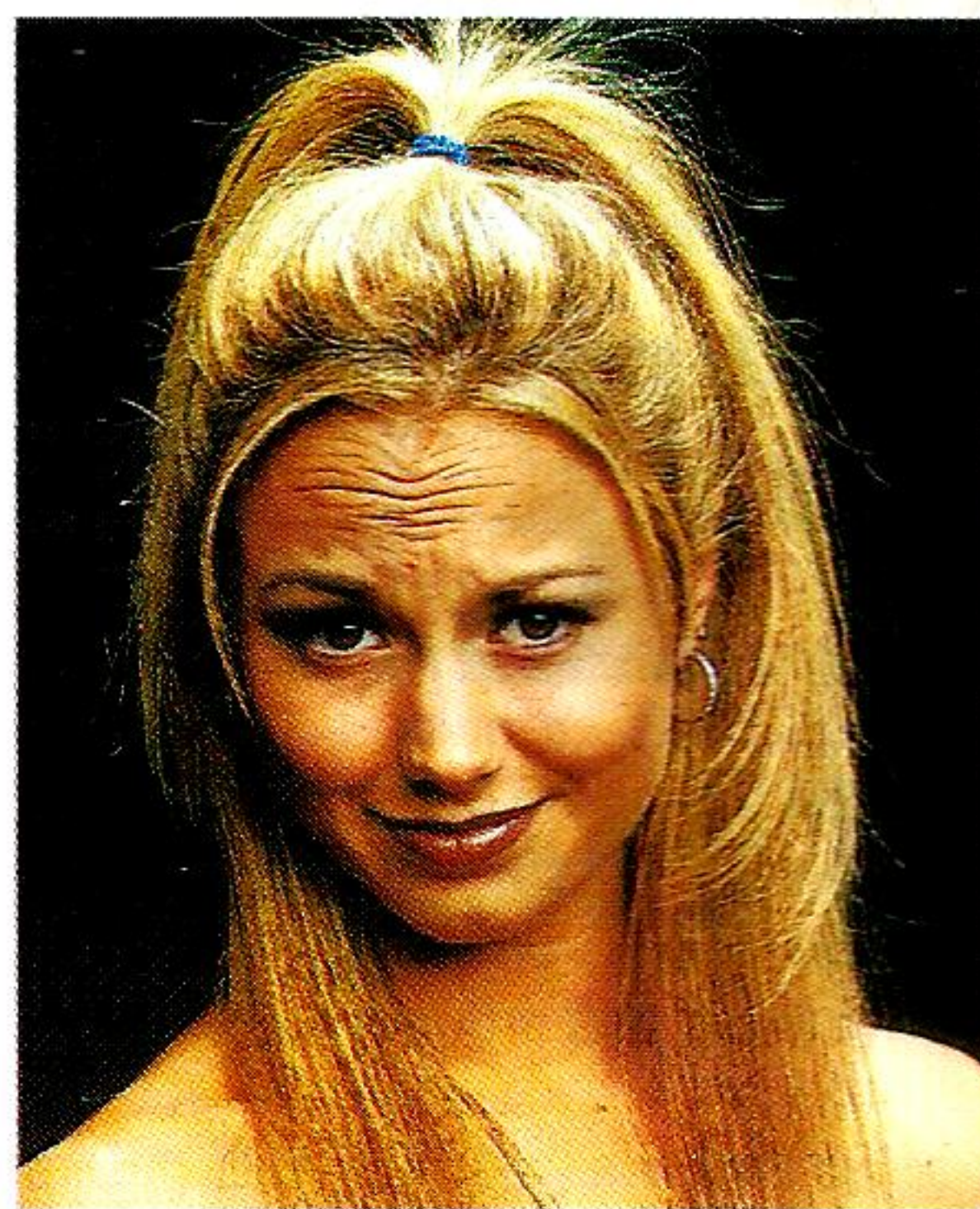
Q: What about Jacquelyn? She seems to have your number. I've also noticed that she targets your hair whenever you two wrestle each other. Haven't Buh Buh Ray and D-Von pointed that out to you yet?

A: That sawed off runt cheats because I'm just too much woman for her to handle, too. It's the only way she can beat me. Let's face it, with my size and skill, no woman in the WWF can handle me right now. And once the Dudleys get through training me, I'll be spitting nails.

Q: Does this no-nonsense approach mean you're through with all those bra and panties matches?

A: Yeah, right. As long as there's some stupid bimbo like Torrie or Lita who thinks she's hotter than me, I'll do whatever it takes to prove her wrong. That's not a threat—it's a promise. □

Like many WWF divas past and present, "The Duchess" uses her good looks and charm to her advantage. Mick Foley is her "victim" here. Matt Hardy has been a target of late as well.



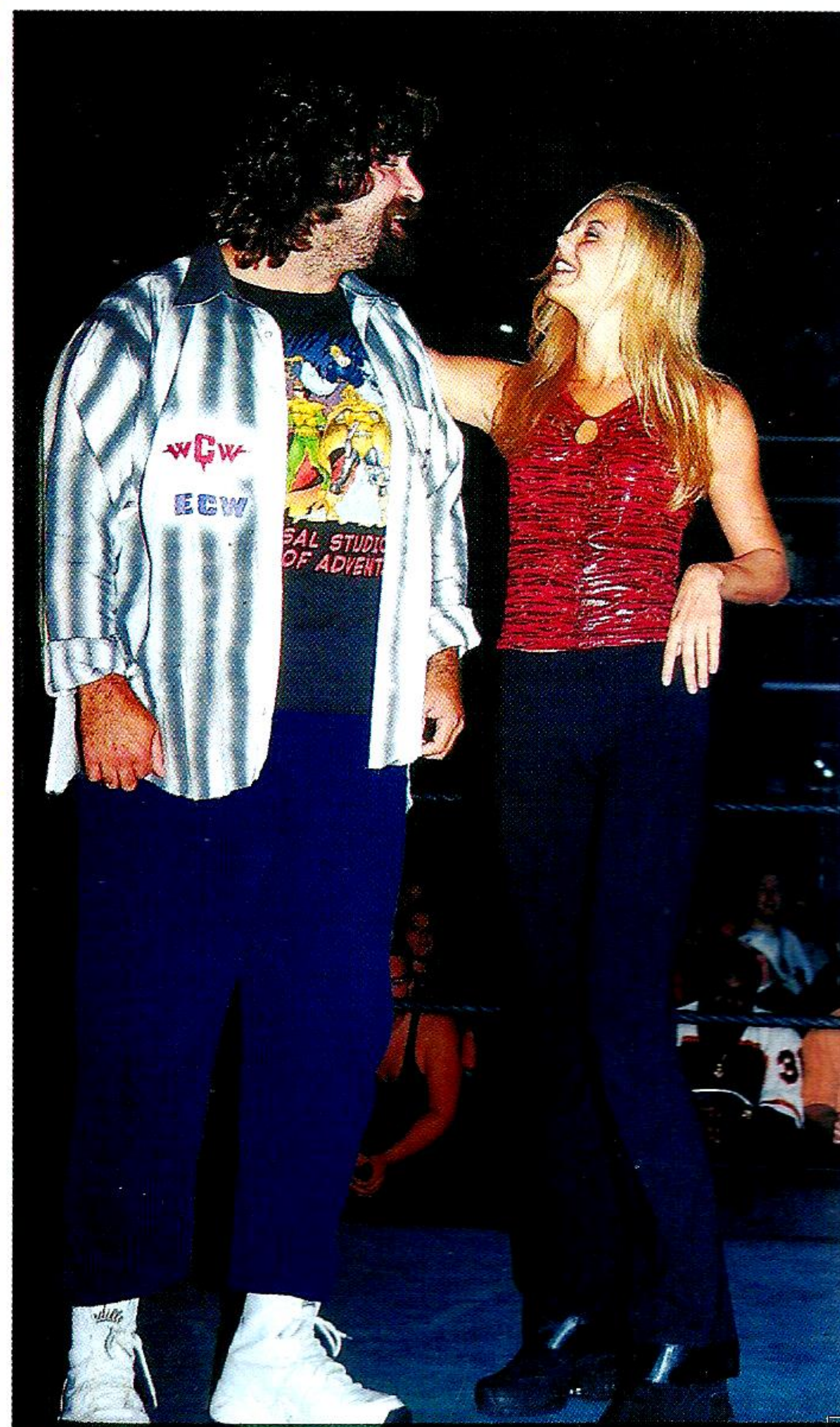
"Matt Hardy is a sucker for a pretty girl. All I have to do is look at him the right way or wiggle a little and it's like he's in a trance. It's not my fault Lita can't keep him happy."

Q: I suppose no one can argue that you do have your charm, but sooner or later, you'll have to start winning matches on your own. If history has shown us anything, it's that manipulation and trickery will only carry you so far. Eventually you have to compete in the ring one-on-one with your opponent.

A: *Duh!* Why do you think I'm working out with Buh Buh Ray and D-Von? They're big and strong *and* mean. And anyone with half a brain can see their influence rubbing off on me already. I'm no Wendi Richter yet. But I'm getting better all the time. Lita? Trish? Debra? I'll make the fans forget about all of them before you know it. I'll change the way people look at women's wrestling forever.

Q: You actually expect the Dudleys to carry you that far? What Do Buh Buh Ray and D-Von know about women's wrestling?

A: They knew enough to put Torrie through a table (*laughs*). But seriously, they've taken an



FEUD ALERT!

The Lowdown On 2002's Hottest Showdowns

VINCE McMAHON'S takeover of WCW (and essentially ECW) has at least one redeeming quality: The best wrestlers in the world are finally competing in the same federation. And while that's good news for the fans, the influx of new wrestlers spells trouble for some of the established WWF superstars.

The addition of top talent like Rob Van Dam and (most likely) The Outsiders, plus the return of Triple-H and Chris Benoit, both of whom missed significant time in 2001 due to injury, means the WWF will be a very crowded house in 2002.

As we've already seen, the federation's pecking order has been skewed. Stars are moving up and down on a weekly basis. On any given night, Steve Austin, Kurt Angle, or The Rock can go from darling to villain in the eyes of the fans and their fellow wrestlers.

Of course, jobs aren't the only things at stake here. These men are also fighting for pride and their spots in the wrestling limelight. Regardless of the reasons, each and every member of the WWF will find himself on a collision course with another wrestler seeking the same glory.

Here are the five feuds *INSIDE WRESTLING* predicts will captivate the wrestling world most in 2002.



THE OUTSIDERS vs. THE DUDLEY BOYZ

If all goes as most expect, Scott Hall and Kevin Nash will make their presence felt sometime around the beginning of the new year. Of course, when Hall is part of the equation, there's no guarantee anything will go as planned. But whether or not the return of The Outsiders proves to be the boon the WWF hopes it will be, you can bet Buh Buh Ray and D-Von won't be on the welcoming committee.

We've seen how the Dudleys react to newcomers. They all but committed fratricide on Spike soon after he made his WWF debut. And it's a sure bet Buh Buh Ray and D-Von's ferocity will be directly proportionate to the amount of fuss The Outsiders kick up.

To those who don't remember their first tours of duty in the WWF, Hall and Nash were two of the most garrulous and popular WWF characters of all-time.

The Dudley Boyz, apparently, need no reminder.

They've already started marking their territory.

"I don't appreciate the idea of everybody making those guys or anyone else out to be saviors," Buh Buh Ray said. "Those guys were one of the greatest tag team ever. But that was years ago. We rule the roost around here now. And we'll show anyone who gets in our way and tries to take food out of our mouths that youth will be served."

Hardly a hollow threat, Buh Buh Ray's words raise a valid point. It's been years since The Outsiders teamed together regularly, and during their final days in WCW, Hall and Nash were hardly the cohesive partnership they were in 1996, the year they invaded WCW. We'll likely see if they are capable of demonstrating that old magic together, and you can bet the Dudleys will be high on their hit list. Just as Hall and Nash figure to be high on the Dudleys' *table* list.

The ultra-cool, super-hip Kevin Nash and Scott Hall (opposite page, left) against the rugged, incredibly sadistic Dudley Boyz (below). Sounds like it could be the most captivating tag team feud in years.



STEVE AUSTIN vs. TRIPLE-H

Triple-H wasn't out more than a few weeks with a torn quadriceps muscle before he put the WWF on notice, vowing to come back meaner and more focused than ever on winning the WWF World title. To emphasize his point, Triple-H made a special appearance on *Excess* so that everyone understood he was speaking to all WWF performers—friend and foe.

"I know some people are going to get their feelings hurt, and some people aren't going to like this," he said, "but they have to understand, the wrestling business isn't about making friends. It's about winning titles. And that's the only thing I intend to do when I come back from my injury. Everybody better get ready, and I mean everybody."

Is there any doubt Steve Austin's ears were the first to prick up when Helmsley issued this salvo? None here.

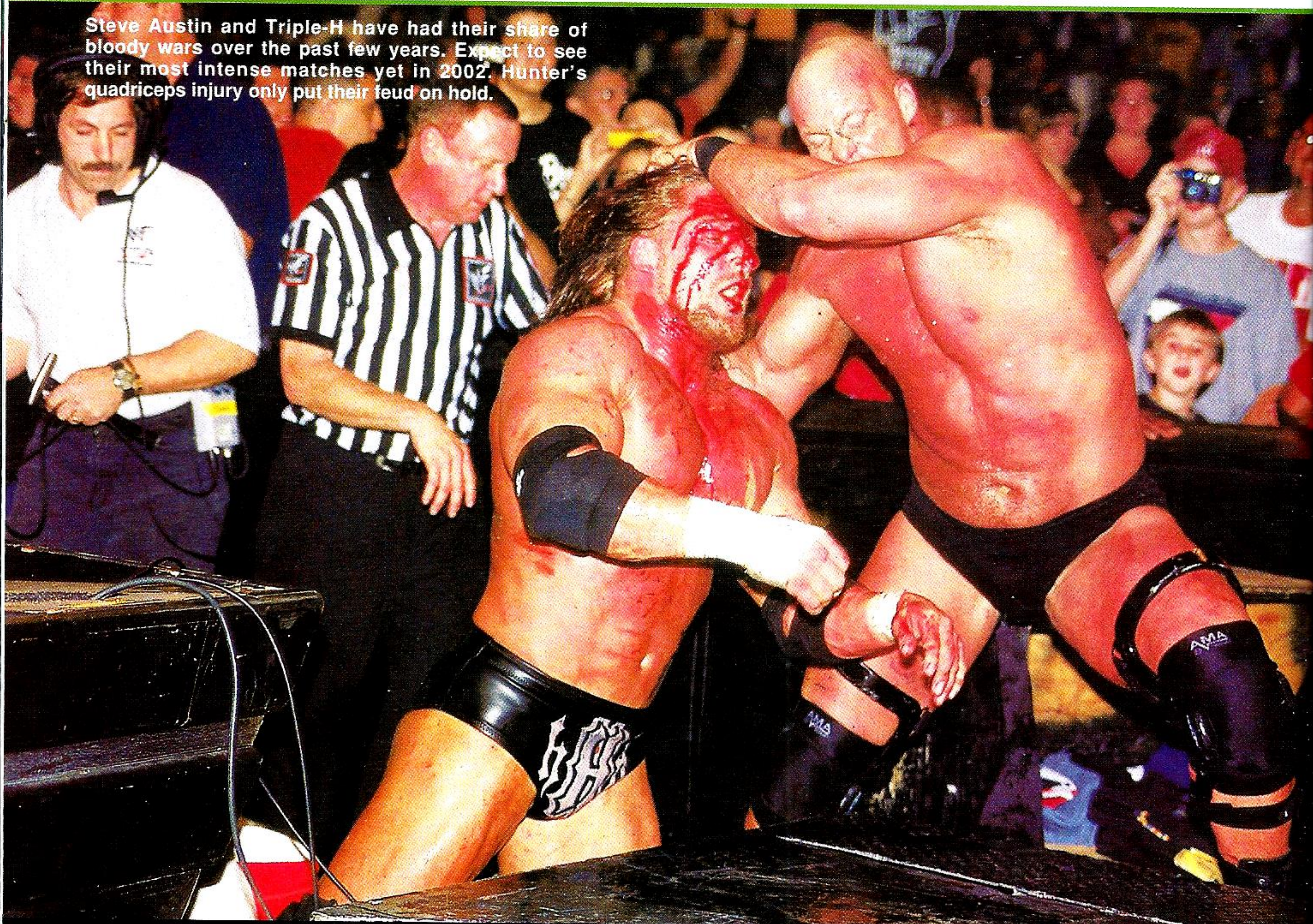
That's because, deep-down, Austin can't resist a challenge—no matter what the political ramifications of

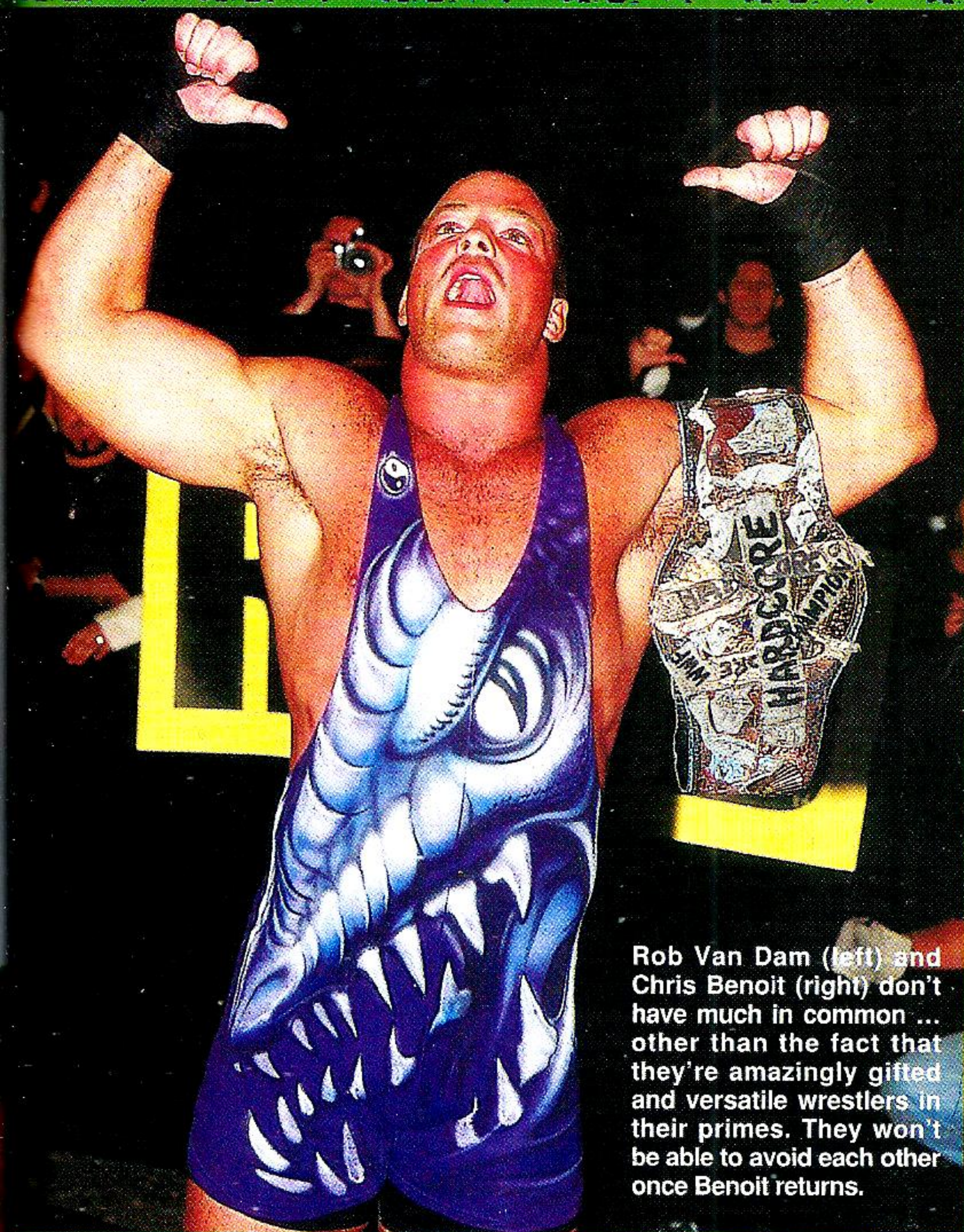
answering the bell may be. Whether or not he's still fighting on behalf of Shane and Stephanie McMahon, "The Texas Rattlesnake" resents anyone laying claim to his role as the baddest man in the WWF. There's little chance "Stone-Cold" will run and hide when Triple-H comes storming back to the federation. And remember, they were on the verge of a full-blown feud when Hunter got hurt.

"Triple-H is a tough man," Austin said. "But a tough man doesn't just flap his gums. A tough man takes care of business without advertising it. Triple-H is doing the easy thing now while he's taking care of that little leg of his. Talking's the easy part. Let's see how tough and focused he is when he gets here and sees me."

Of course, it never takes much to get Austin's combative juices flowing, but the war of words is clearly on. By the time these guys square off, they're likely to be the two most driven competitors in the federation. By the time their feud is over, they could also be the most spent.

Steve Austin and Triple-H have had their share of bloody wars over the past few years. Expect to see their most intense matches yet in 2002. Hunter's quadriceps injury only put their feud on hold.





Rob Van Dam (left) and Chris Benoit (right) don't have much in common ... other than the fact that they're amazingly gifted and versatile wrestlers in their primes. They won't be able to avoid each other once Benoit returns.



ROB VAN DAM vs. CHRIS BENOIT

Steve Austin might sell the most merchandise of any WWF wrestler, and The Rock might be the most compelling character in the federation, but a lot of fans consider Rob Van Dam and Chris Benoit to be, pound-for-pound, the top two wrestlers in the world.

However, only one can be *the* best. And although Benoit's return date hadn't been established as of press time (February seems about right), there's no question "The Canadian Crippler" will be gunning to claim that informal title—and some very real titles as well—by the time he is completely healed from spinal surgery.

No one knows how much hardware Van Dam will be wearing when Benoit finally climbs through the ropes again. And who cares? Championship belts will be almost incidental when these two evenly matched thoroughbreds clash in the ring.

On one hand you have Van Dam, a finesse wrestler who can get as hardcore as the most ruthless men in the sport. On the other hand you have Benoit, a bulldog to the bone who's as adept in the

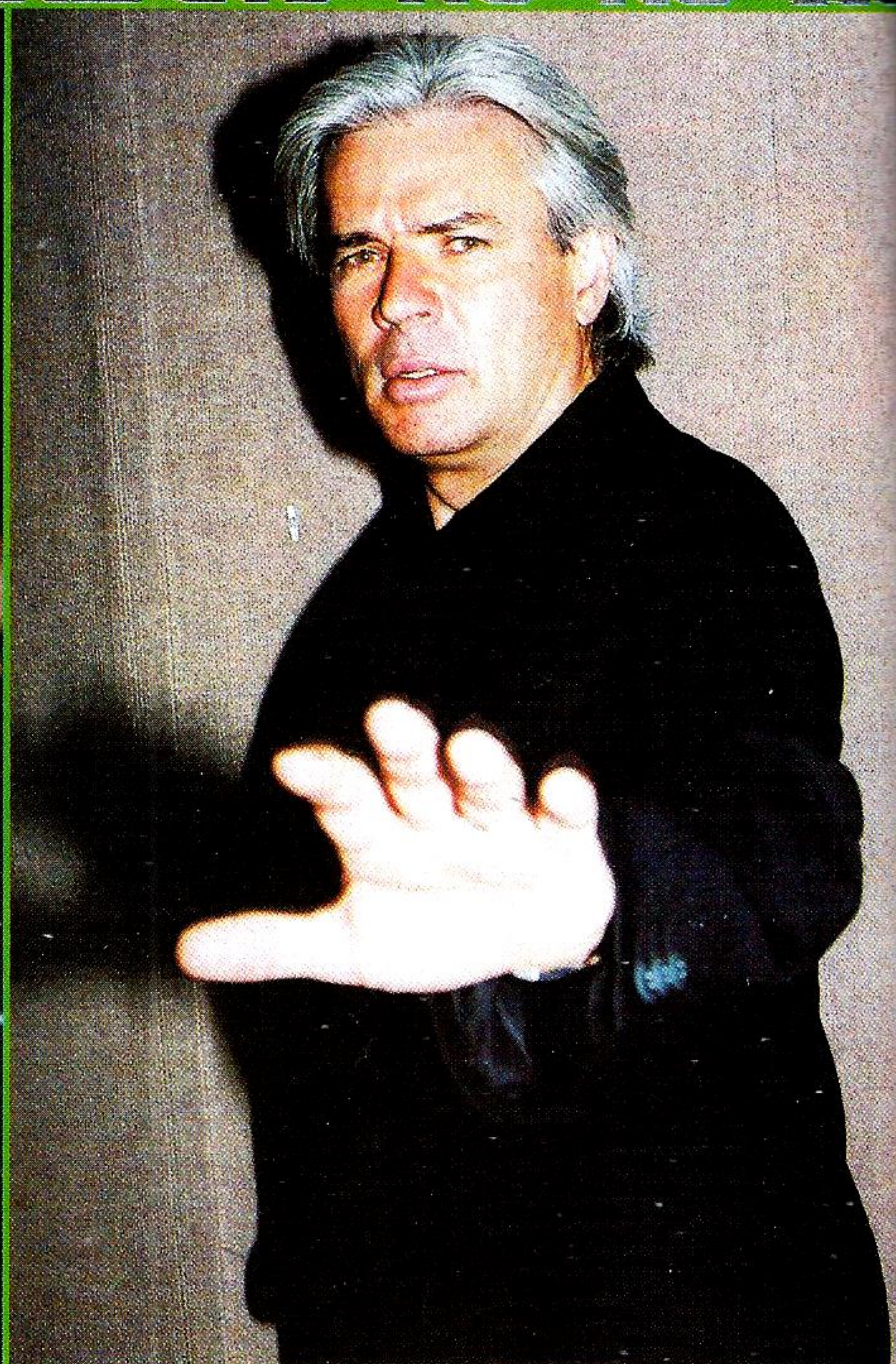
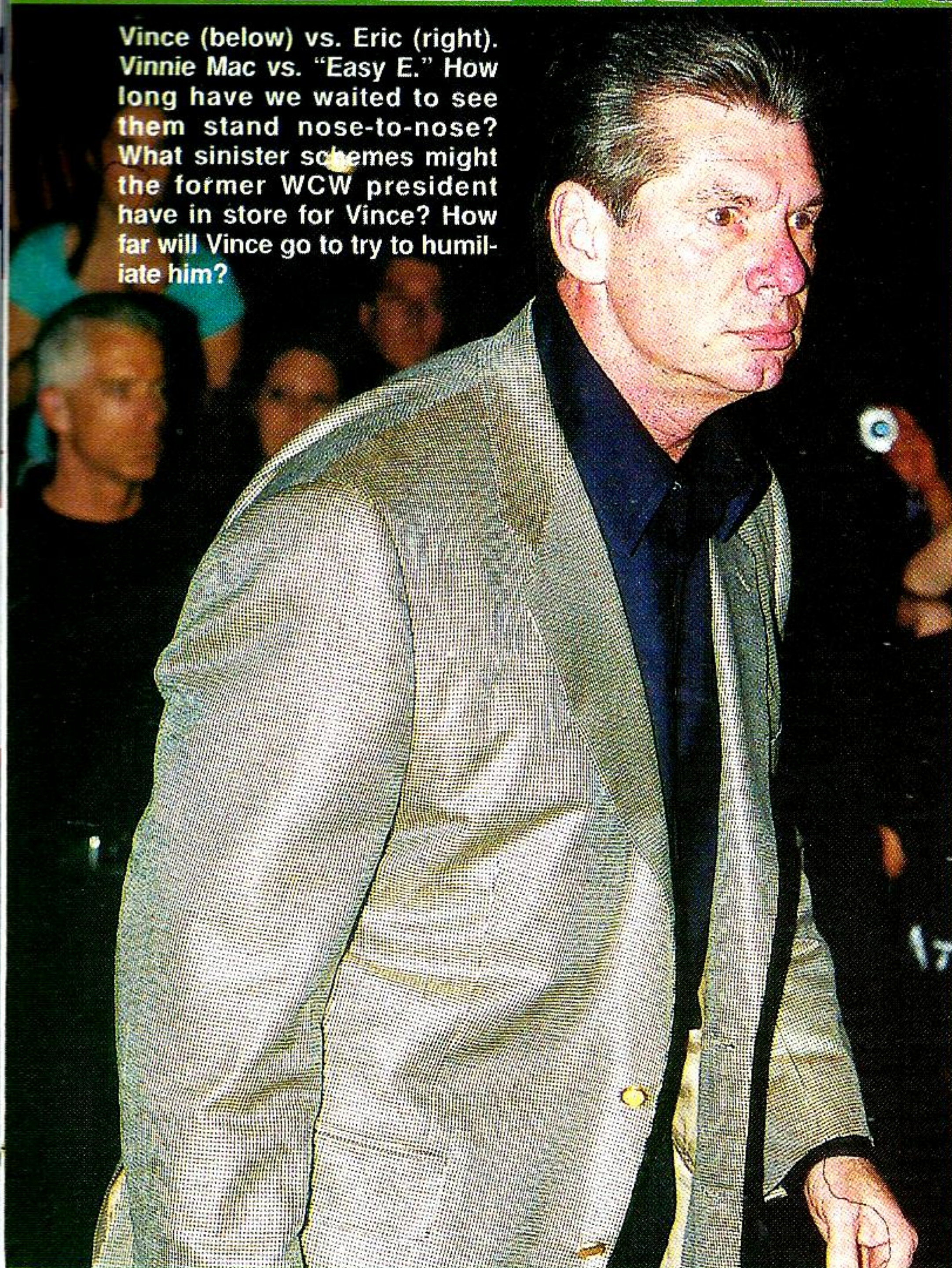
air as he is on the mat. Plus, both are marvelous physical specimens, capable of wrestling in short, intense bursts or prolonged, endurance-sapping marathons.

That's where the similarities end. Benoit, a man of few words, prefers to let his wrestling speak for him, while RVD, a classic narcissist, never forgoes an opportunity to let everyone know just how special a wrestler he really is.

This showdown has the makings of an all-time classic feud, with enormous ramifications for the victor. Should Van Dam dispose of Benoit, he'll gain even more respect from casual WWF fans who begrudgingly respect Benoit's vast ability, and probably gain entrance into the WWF's elite top tier. If "The Wolverine" succeeds in humbling a rising star like RVD, he'll jettison into the upper echelon and pick up right where he left off before surgery.

No matter who proves to be the better wrestler, anyone who witnesses this showdown will be a real winner.

Vince (below) vs. Eric (right). Vinnie Mac vs. "Easy E." How long have we waited to see them stand nose-to-nose? What sinister schemes might the former WCW president have in store for Vince? How far will Vince go to try to humiliate him?



VINCE McMAHON vs. ERIC BISCHOFF

At long last, wrestling fans should get the chance to see if all that sniping between Bischoff and Vince just a few years ago was genuine vitriol or just pure wrestling shtick. "Easy E" is expected to join Hall and Nash in a reprise of the famous invasion of WCW in 1996.

Granted, the luster of a Vince-Bischoff showdown is a bit diminished given Vince's current position of power and Bischoff's recent obscurity. But if any two men can tear open old wounds, Bischoff and McMahon can.

That's why this feud promises to captivate us all on many different levels. In the ring, McMahon would have to be the odds-on favorite, even with Bischoff's martial arts proficiency. In light of Bischoff's in-ring track record, whatever nefarious schemes he intends to unleash on Vince will probably be executed behind the scenes, and behind the brawny shoulders of Messrs. Hall and Nash.

Sneaky. That's just the way Eric Bischoff is. He

might even forge an alliance with Shane and Stephanie, who know exactly which buttons to push to get a rise from their father.

And don't expect a rational, calculated response from Vince. Like Steve Austin, Vinnie Mac knows no other way to meet a challenge than head-on. Sure, he can be as manipulative and cunning as Bischoff. But that infamous Irish temper makes him a hard man to put down—and an even harder man to reason with.

Here's a scenario that's not out of the question: McMahon gets so carried away with purging Bischoff from the WWF that he puts the federation on the line in a steel cage match against his nemesis.

"Vince McMahon simply does not like Eric Bischoff," said WWF expert Thomas Pilliard. "And we know Bischoff has other potential enemies around here, like Chris Jericho and X-Pac and perhaps Austin. If Bischoff has the audacity to show his face around here, I expect Vince to get his back up right away. Then things will get real interesting in a hurry."

THE ROCK vs. KURT ANGLE

Prediction: Not only will The Rock and Kurt Angle knock heads next year, they'll do it the year after that, and the year after that. And provided both men are still wrestling in the WWF in 2005, Kurt Angle and The Rock will feud then, too.

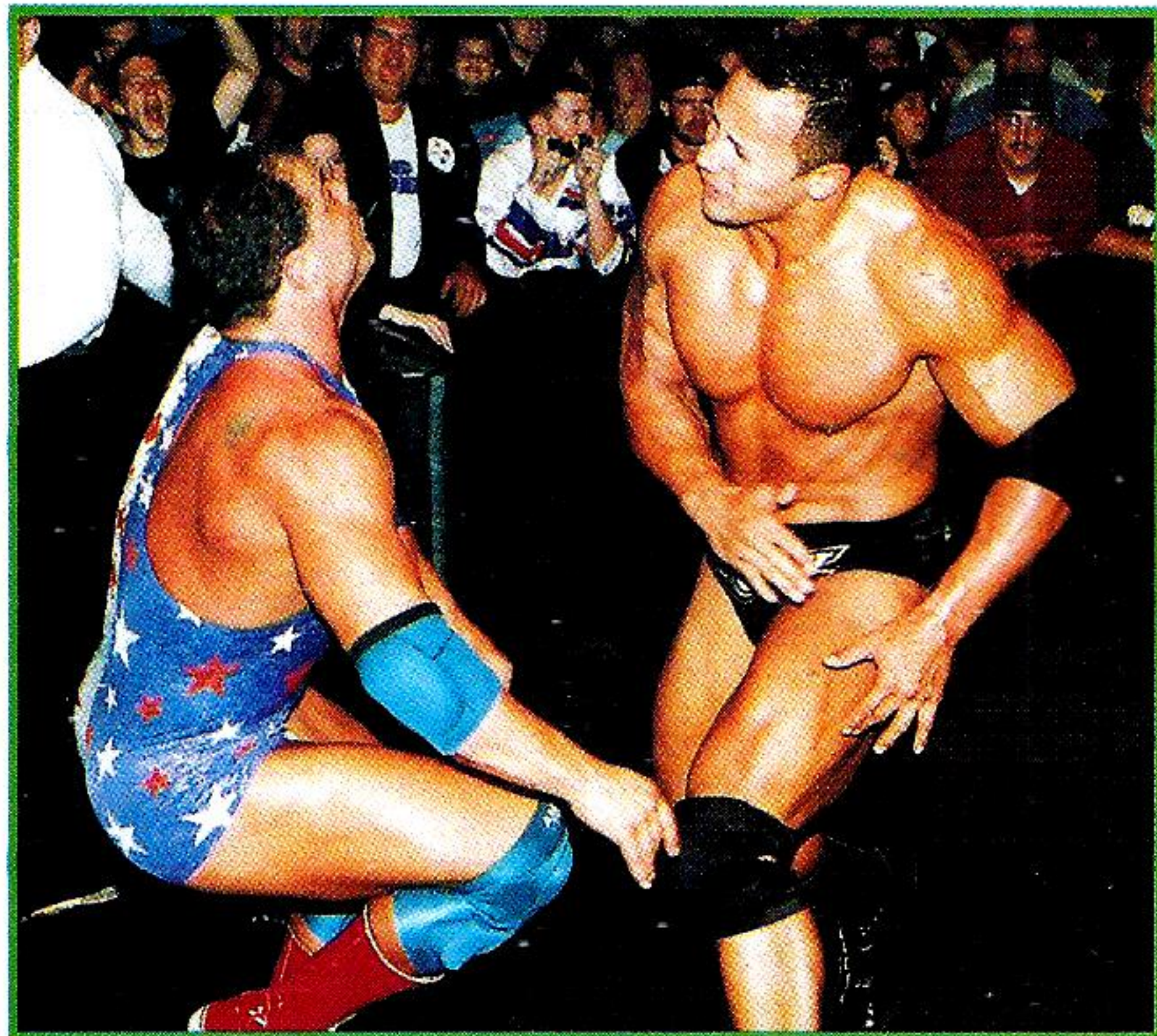
There's just a fundamental difference between these men that will always lead to another conflict—no matter what principle or cause they stand for at any given time. For example, Kurt Angle detests The Rock's showmanship (probably because he can't quite match it), and The Rock resents Angle for peddling a wholesome image (which he probably perceives to be phony).

Want more proof? Look at the Alliance dilemma. The Rock proved to be WWF to the core. Angle, on the other hand, well, no one really knew where "Mr. Integrity's" allegiance lay at any given moment.

Fundamental differences aside, what really draws the two to combat is their close proximity in the WWF spotlight. Let's face it, The Rock and Angle are the federation's flagship performers. Their orbits pass through main-event bouts, title matches, and major storylines. And they'll be hovering around the holy grail—the WWF World title—for years to come.

The WWF isn't big enough for both Kurt Angle and The Rock, and with other notables such as Steve Austin, RVD, and Triple-H floating in the top tier, both warriors are almost mandated to eliminate the other from the sport.

"The Rock's jealous," Angle said. "He's mad that I have these gold medals right here, and all he has is pie ... or strudel ... or whatever. Now I know that burns him up, and he may never get over it, but he better get used to the fact that I'm an Olympic hero and he'll never be one." □



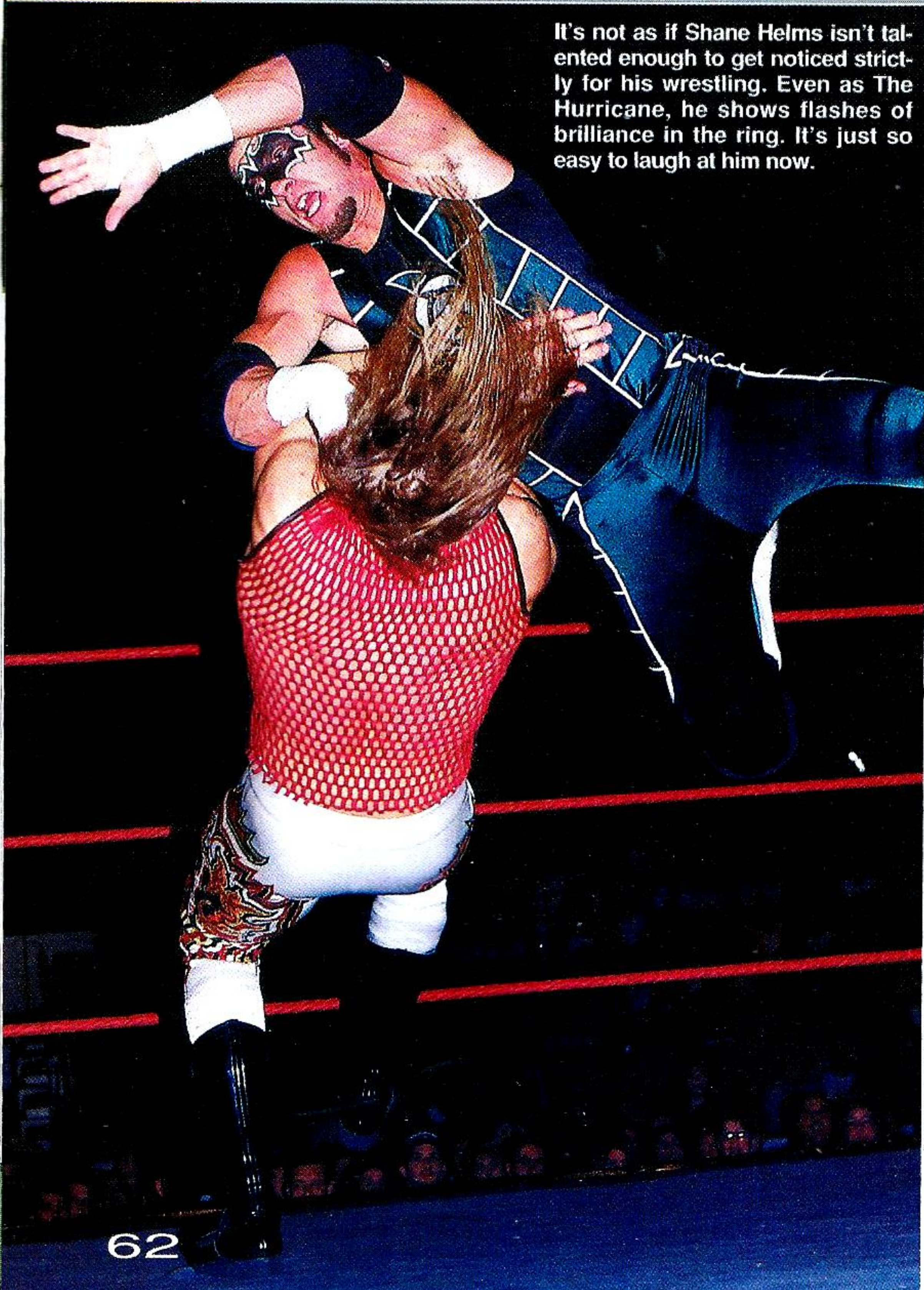
The Rock has gotten the best of Kurt Angle in most of their matchups so far (above and right). There's no way we've seen the last of the showdowns between the two of them, though.



shane

TRAPPED IN THE EYE OF

Batman made Bruce Wayne famous. Superman turned Clark Kent from a zero into a hero. But, Shane Helms, for the sake of your career, heed this Hurricane warning!

A photograph of Shane Helms in a wrestling ring. He is wearing a blue and white striped singlet and is in a dynamic pose, possibly performing a move. He has a mask on and is looking towards the camera. A woman with long brown hair, wearing a red mesh top and white pants, is in the foreground, facing away from the camera, looking towards Shane. The ring has red ropes and a blue mat.

It's not as if Shane Helms isn't talented enough to get noticed strictly for his wrestling. Even as The Hurricane, he shows flashes of brilliance in the ring. It's just so easy to laugh at him now.

By Harry Burkett

*"In brightest day, in blackest night,
No evil shall escape my sight.
Let those who worship evil's might,
Beware my power, Green Lantern's light."
—Green Lantern, superhero*

THAT'S TOUGH TALK from a guy who is rendered helpless whenever the traffic light changes from green to yellow. Nevertheless, each successive Green Lantern (D.C. Comics changes his persona from time to time) recites that oath upon accepting a power ring that creates solid light images that can be shaped to take the form of anything he imagines. Green Lantern's bold fight for justice has captivated children for generations.

Shane Helms was among them. Other kids liked the more famous superheroes, the ones with the movies and television shows, such as Batman, Superman, and Wonder Woman. Young Shane was among those kids who believed an obscure taste was a discriminating taste. He had to dig deep into the comic book racks—amid mid-card heroes such as Captain America and Aquaman—to find Green Lantern.

Helms grew to be an upstanding young man and a fine cruiserweight wrestler, despite his stint in Three Count. There's no doubt the Lantern's wholesome message

helms

THE HURRICANE





Shane Helms pins Chris Krueger during a match held in the WCW of old. Helms was just starting to shine in the cruiserweight division when the company was sold to the WWF in March. Enter the WWF creative team!

became a guiding principle in his life. But it doesn't seem as if he's using his superhero mental powers by masquerading as The Hurricane, or Hurricane Helms. As a comic book aficionado, Helms should be



A match between Christian and Shane Helms probably wouldn't draw a great deal of fan interest right now. That's why The Hurricane was born, and Helms plays the part well. However, he can't afford to be The Hurricane for too long.

ashamed of falling from the lofty heights of Green Lantern to the campy lows of The Hurricane.

Whatsupwiddat?

"Citizen, The Hurricane works the crowd into a frenzy, from which I generate my superpowers," said the painted one. "My powers are without equal; never have they been so strong. Therefore, the energy of the people must be strong as well. One glimpse of my Hurricycle and my faithful sidekick, Mighty Molly, and the people become energized. My foes cower in fear. Who can doubt the awesomeness of my aura?"

Most of what Shane Helms' alter ego says is true. He's one of the more popular mid-carders in the WWF. The merchandising possibilities—Hurricane masks, Hurricane dolls, Hurricane T-shirts, and toy Hurricycles—must have WWFE marketing executives salivating. He is now capable of doing what every good superhero should do: selling stuff. Don't be surprised if a genuine Hurricane comic book is in the works.

Helms will benefit in the short term. "Gregory" Helms was dying a quick death. What about the long term? Helms can't expect to build a 10- or 20-year career on this Hurricane character, can he?

Duke "The Dumpster" Droese was one of the WWF's most popular wrestlers in the mid-1990s. Barely remember him? That's somewhat surprising considering Droese generated strong crowd responses. One shout of "I'm gonna take out the trash!" was enough to get the place energized. For those who don't remember, he was Jim Duggan with less character depth. Droese failed to transform his mid-card success into a top tier push.

"The people loved me and still do down here in Florida," said Droese. "They liked the garbage man outfit, they liked the big trash compactor move, the take out the trash line, and it was all great. But people didn't want to see me as anything but 'The Dumpster.' If I took off that garbage man's outfit, say, and went after Bret Hart's WWF title, the fans wouldn't like it. I suppose if they booed, that would be okay. But I mean they wouldn't like it—and there's a difference.

"I made a lot of money and a lot of fans, so I guess it was worthwhile. But could you imagine a garbage man carrying around the WWF belt? Well, maybe in the mid-'90s, but not today. You know, you can be too effective at what you do."

The Bushwhackers, Hillbilly Jim, and Doink the Clown would be similar examples. Mastering a very specific role leads to typecasting, no matter

how talented the individual. Consider Jim Nabors as Gomer Pyle, Jim Varney as Ernest P. Worrell, and Michael Richards as Kramer. These actors were defined so much by certain roles that it became hard for them to be taken seriously, although they were tremendously versatile performers. The same is true for wrestlers.

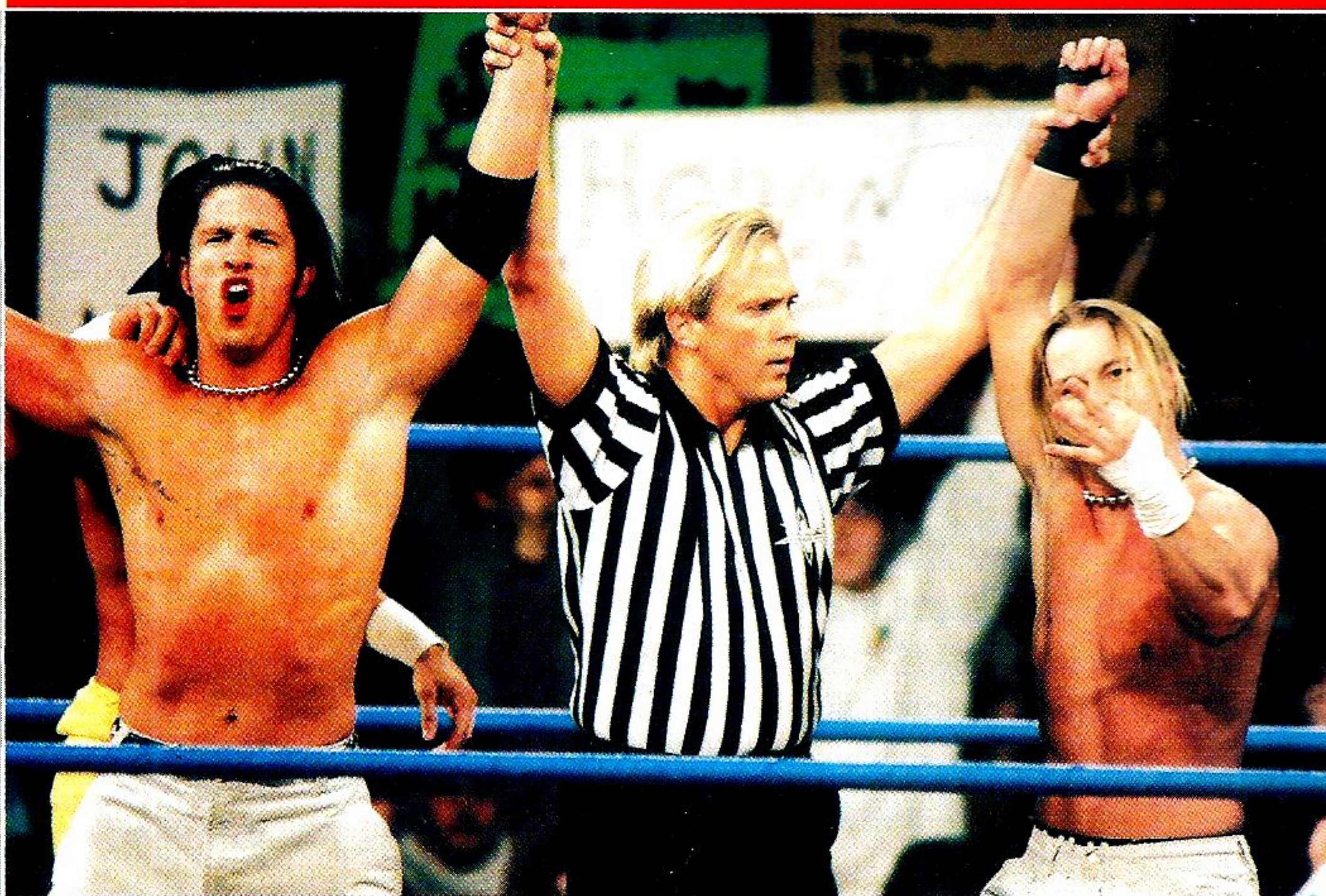
Sometimes it's better to be a flop. How about Kevin Nash as Vinnie Vegas? Tazz as Kid Krush? Steve Austin as The Ringmaster? If any of those characters had been slightly effective, they could have been stuck as mid-carders—and not the superstars they are today. One never knows. The Honky Tonk Man, minus the Elvis gimmick, could have been the Triple-H of his generation.

The Hurricane isn't taken seriously, and that will be a major problem when he gets serious about his career. He's popular in large part because the fans are laughing with him and at him. How can other wrestlers—as partners or opponents—respect him?

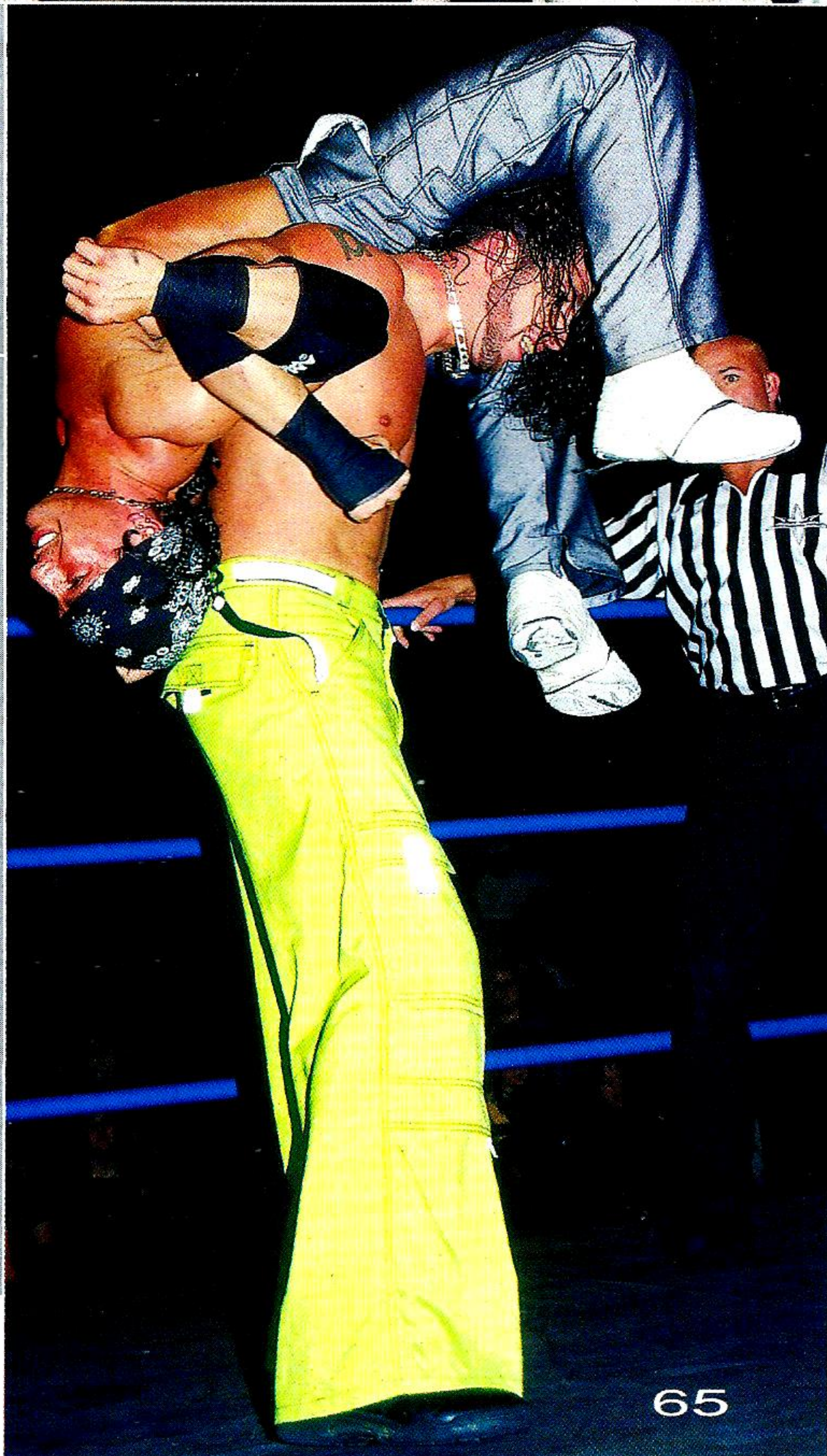
"What is it Jim Ross says all the time?" asked Bradshaw, who trounced Helms for the European title recently. "Oh, that boy's goofier than a pet coon. Naw, make that a pet coon with rabies. He's already got a coon mask. You know what his most dangerous move is? It's when he puts that darn cape on, gets on that top rope, and gets ready to fly. I laughed my ass off, even when he was gonna jump on top of me. I swear, if that boy went for a pin, I might not be able to kick out from laughin' so hard. I don't care if Faarooq was as drunk as a polecat; there's no way in hell I'd want that guy as a partner."

That's the locker room consensus. Few want to be stuck in comedy matches against a super buffoon. Can anyone imagine the WWF booking The Hurricane in a pay-per-view match against Steve Austin, or even Edge? Not a chance. At only 6'1" and 210 pounds, Helms already has a problem as a light heavyweight in a federation that doesn't treat light heavyweights with much respect. Helms will never fulfill his true potential as long as he continues this comedy act.

Perhaps Hurricane Helms will understand it this way: *Make haste to shed this gimmick soon, or you'll meet the same fate as The Goon.* □



The old WCW creative team tried to make Helms more interesting by putting him together with Shannon Moore (pictured with Helms, above) and Evan Karagias in Three Count. It worked to a degree. A subsequent feud with Karagias (right) didn't do either man much good.



editors' roundtable

Are The McMahons Overexposed On TV?

"Instead of having the creative team trying to figure out how to make the latest McMahon turn believable, why don't they spend that time and effort on Justin Credible, Raven, Mike Awesome, and Lance Storm?"

—Dan Murphy

THE EGOMANIACAL FATHER operates his corporate empire with ruthless cunning. The vengeful son resents his domineering father and seeks to steal the family company from him. The neglected daughter sheds her wholesome image and surgically bolsters her reputation. The long-suffering mother just does everything she can to hold it all together.

It sounds like the basic plot of any nighttime or daytime soap

opera. But these aren't the Ewings, Carringtons, or Newmans. These are the McMahons. Some entertainment analysts wonder why nighttime soap operas do not dominate the prime time schedule as they did 15 years ago. That's easy. Viewers are getting their soap opera fix from **Raw**, **Smackdown**, and **Sunday Night Heat**! That totals five hours per week, the same amount of time as a daily soap opera.

Inevitably, the intrigue among Vince, Linda, Shane, and Stephanie—none of whom is a pro wrestler in the strict sense—overshadows the wrestling itself. Wrestling fans prefer to see Steve Austin, The Rock, Kurt Angle, and Rob Van Dam.

But some might argue that the McMahons, the most dysfunctional family on television, hook non-wrestling fans. The infighting of a wealthy family might attract those casual viewers who aren't impressed by wrestling or violence. Hence the term sports entertainment.

Indeed, the McMahons dominate WWF TV and pay-per-view. They are at the center of every major storyline. The actions of Vince, Linda, Shane, and Stephanie are usually more important than those of the wrestlers. Is this good for the business? Publisher Stu Saks, Editor-in-Chief Dave Lenker, and Senior Writers Harry Burkett and Dan Murphy discuss the issue.

Four years after their feud started, Vince McMahon and Steve Austin still can't get along. Or are they getting along this week? It's hard to keep track. As compelling a character Vince has been, it's time for him and the rest of his family to allow the wrestlers to have more of the spotlight.



STU SAKS: We've had some rather heated debates sitting around this table. This is the first time Dan is joining us, so I want to tell him the rules: no shoving, no fighting, and no name-calling. We're not going to agree on everything, so we should accept that heading into this. For this issue, our topic is the McMahons. Are they overexposed? Are they promoting themselves too much? Let me get a quick yes or no from everyone here.

DAVE LENKER: Yes.

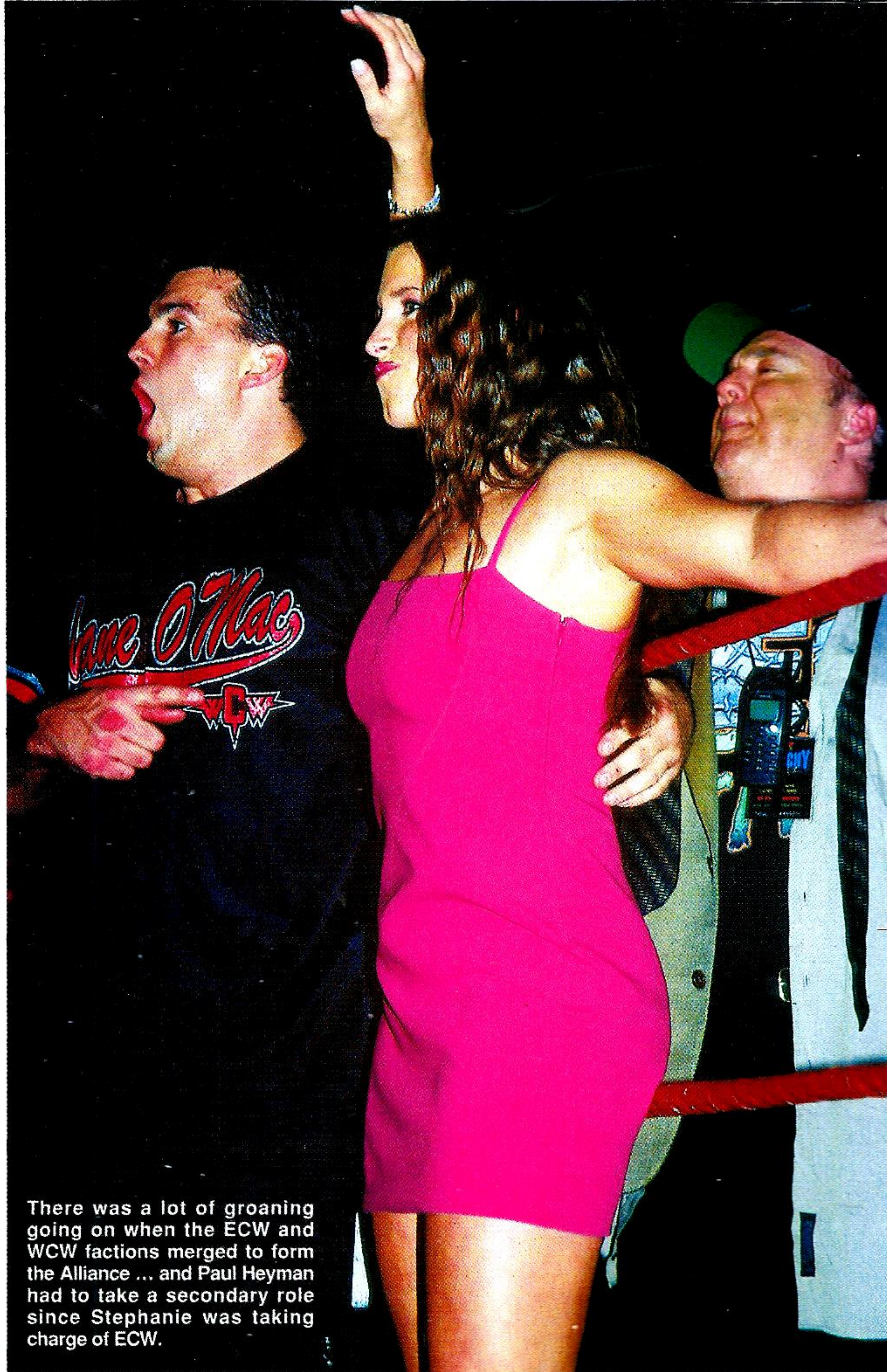
HARRY BURKETT: Yes.

DAN MURPHY: Hell yes.

STU SAKS: And I say yes as well. I guess this "Editors' Roundtable" session is adjourned. Just kidding. We probably have our individual reasons for thinking the McMahons are overexposed and probably have different opinions on what their roles should be. Dave, why don't you tell us how they're overexposed?

LENKER: Where do I begin? Individually, all of the McMahons—except maybe Linda—are very good performers. It's amazing how one family can have so much genuine on-air talent, but I guess it shouldn't be that surprising since they've been following wrestling all of their lives. Everyone credits Steve Austin for launching the WWF back to the number-one spot a few years ago. I think half of the credit, if not more, should go to Vince McMahon. He was such an effective villain, with the facial expressions, gravelly voice, and wrestling ability on top of that. Then Shane came in as the spoiled rich kid, which was fine. But then came Stephanie, and Linda every other week. It just became too much. Too much of a good thing, let's put it that way. They've overstayed their welcome.

BURKETT: I agree with you. The WWF wouldn't be as fun to watch if Shane and Stephanie weren't so good on the microphone and, in Shane's case, also good in the ring. If Vince were simply shoving his children down our throats, with no



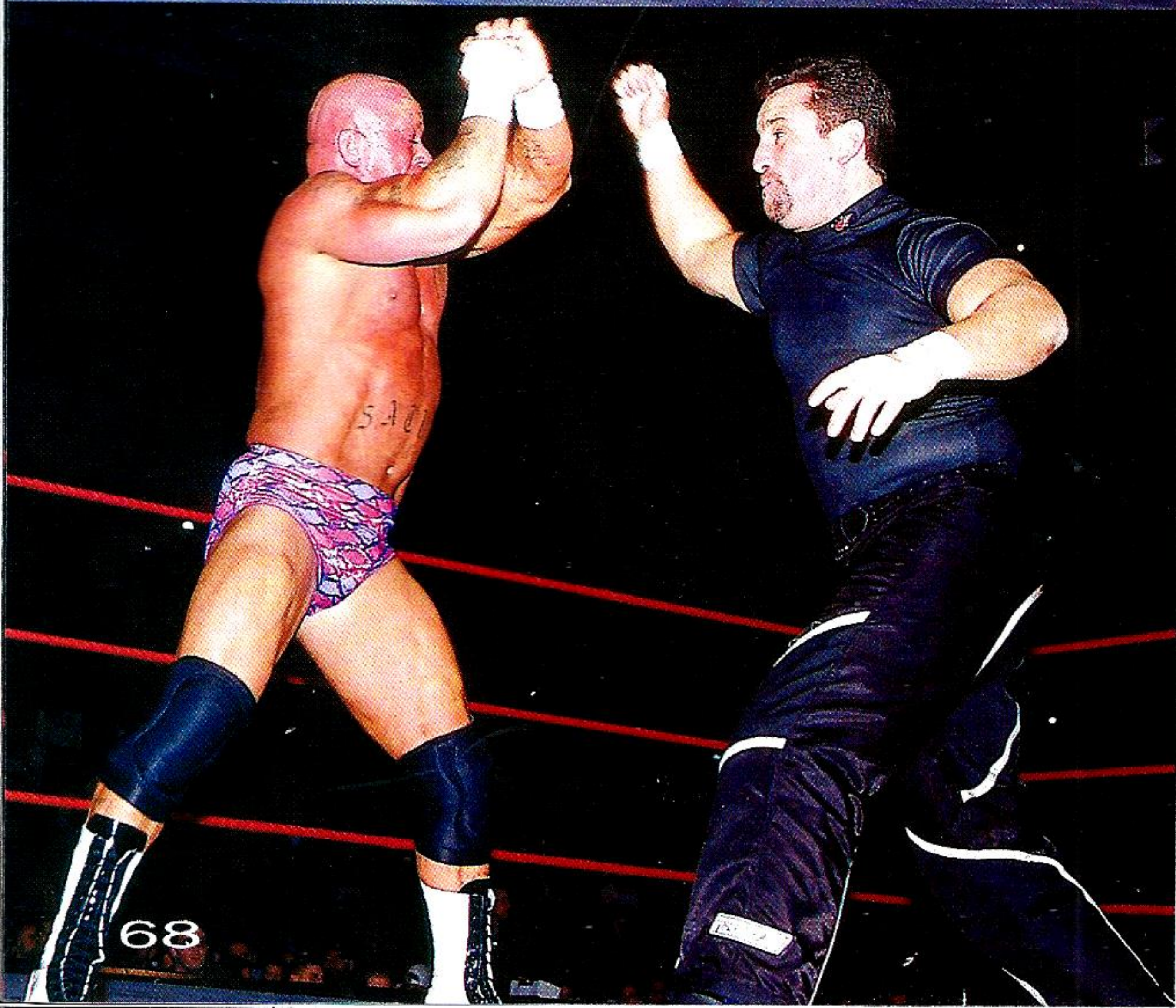
There was a lot of groaning going on when the ECW and WCW factions merged to form the Alliance ... and Paul Heyman had to take a secondary role since Stephanie was taking charge of ECW.

regard for whether they were talented or not, it would be unbearable. But you're right. Vince, Shane, and Stephanie are good, but their importance is diluted because there are so many of them. And they've turned on each other so many times and reunited so many times that we don't take them seriously. Too many turns.

LENKER: I noticed you didn't name Linda as a good performer.

BURKETT: I have four words for you, Dave: Don't get me started. She has a cue-card delivery, worse than Sable. "I-don't-think-you-are-behaving-Shane-and-Stephanie." What an automaton. I don't know what's worse, Linda talking on the microphone or sitting comatose in a wheelchair.

MURPHY: Wait a minute. I think that works for Linda. She doesn't come across as a superficial, loud,



or obnoxious person. She comes across like any mom, like my mom or your mom. She seems unrehearsed and a little nervous. That's authentic. And it's quite refreshing compared to the overbearing theatrics of Vince, Shane, and Stephanie.

BURKETT: Her bad WrestleMania entrance music has to go.

SAKS: Look, Linda's on-air abilities might leave something to be desired, but she's demonstrated that she's a great CEO. So I guess we ought to give her some slack there. Still, doesn't it mean something when the real CEO of the company, not a made-up one like Ric Flair was in WCW, comes out and makes an announcement? Doesn't the presence of all the McMahons carry some weight, since they really do have the power they brag about? Doesn't that add to the authenticity?

MURPHY: I suppose it reflects real life in the sense that this would happen in any family business, especially one that has a TV show. Doesn't every owner of a car dealership or furniture store try to get their snot-nosed kids on their TV commercials? It's only natural, and I think it's a small price to pay.

BURKETT: But you agree there is a price.

MURPHY: Sure, there's a price. The more the McMahons are the focus on television, that's less time for wrestlers who desperately need it. Instead of having the creative team trying to figure out how to make the latest McMahon turn believable, why don't they spend that time and effort on Justin Credible, Raven, Mike Awesome, and Lance Storm? It seems that an entire two-hour show will revolve around the McMahons and the top tier guys like Steve Austin, The Rock, and Rob Van Dam. The

The feud between Test and Edge has been given a decent amount of WWF TV time (top left), but Perry Saturn and Tommy Dreamer get stuck in dark matches or on *Metal*. Eliminate some (or all) of those McMahon-dominated segments and there'd be a lot more time for undercard wrestlers (left).

shows are top-loaded. There needs to be a better mix of mid-card storylines. The Spike Dudley-Molly Holly boyfriend-girlfriend thing was good. If the whole show focuses on whether Vince will join Shane or vice versa, that's a waste because we've seen every variation already. But, like I said, it's a small price in return for a product that is otherwise very good.

LENKER: I'm really an advocate of the revolving door approach. Vince McMahon does something really smart. If he believes his character has become burned out, he stays off television. They'll say he's in Europe, tending to other business, or they won't even refer to him being absent. In reality, he's backstage the whole time. Shane disappeared for a few months early this year, before he became owner of WCW. Because he was gone for that stretch, his buying WCW had more credibility than it otherwise would've had. I think the general rule should be that only one McMahon is involved in storylines at a time. When that McMahon burns out, bring another one in to replace them. That will work, whether the McMahons are the good guys or the despicable heels. Murph?

MURPHY: That's true, especially if they're heels. In *Dallas*, J.R. was so effective because he was a bad person in an otherwise decent family. Sure, the other family members had their shortcomings, but they were basically decent. The fact that Vince, Shane, and Stephanie all seem to be so evil, it makes the whole thing lack credibility. How could most of those family members be so evil, but still be together? How could Linda tolerate it? By the way, I think Linda will turn heel on Vince and join WCW. That's the only card that hasn't been played yet—and you know the McMahons won't stop until they've played all the cards.

BURKETT: What we can't have is a repeat of the fatal four-way at WrestleMania 2000. There was a McMahon in every corner. Here's



Recent history suggests that before long, Steph will be Daddy's little girl again. Maybe they'll unite against the evil Shane and Linda soon. It'd probably be a smart idea, though, to not feature the whole family prominently on TV at all times. Or maybe not at all.

the fundamental problem: With the McMahons taking so much of the spotlight, and appearing so power-

'With the McMahons taking so much of the spotlight, and appearing so powerful, they make the wrestlers seem like silly pawns in comparison. Aren't Vince McMahon's actions infinitely more important than what Steve Austin does? Wrestlers no longer seem like deciders of their own fate.'

—Harry Burkett

ful, they make the wrestlers seem like silly pawns in comparison. Aren't Vince McMahon's actions infinitely more important than what Steve Austin does? Wrestlers no longer seem like deciders of their own fate. That takes the drama out of what they do. To put it into terms Vince McMahon would understand, it's bad for business. There must be dramatic conflict between *wrestlers* because, ultimately, it will be a wrestling solution that will sell tickets. The focus should be on the wrestlers headlining the next pay-per-view, not the McMahons. □

data sheet

PERRY SATURN

HEIGHT: 5'10"

WEIGHT: 237

HOMETOWN: Boston, MA

GREATEST MOMENT TO DATE:

Until November 3, 1997, his biggest claim to fame was being one-half of the successful and innovative Eliminators. On that night, he cleanly beat Disco Inferno for the WCW TV title, his first major singles win

HE DOES IT SO WELL: The extremely unorthodox approach he has to matches now must be befuddling to opponents. Has he watched too many George Steele tapes?

WHERE HE NEEDS TO IMPROVE:

His quickness and mobility are below average, but he'll have a hard time improving those much at this point of his career. His top priority should be to find a way to get the WWF to push him

PET FINISHER: Moss-covered, three-handled family credenza (Dr. Seuss reference)

BIGGEST TEST TO DATE: He cracked his knee and tibia and tore his anterior cruciate ligaments all at once in an ECW match in May 1997. He was expected to miss a year, but he was back on September 8. And he did a nice job of altering his style to a tougher, more mat-based attack

OUTLOOK FOR 2002: Get TV time! Repeat: Get TV time! Saturn was entertaining as the goofball who'd been hit in the head too many times, but it soon came time for him to move on. Problem is, he hasn't moved on to anything. He has to hope the WWF splits in half. Otherwise he'll probably remain a bit player

QUICKIE EXPERT ANALYSIS:

"People who say I'm not right in the head must not have ever seen Saturn. But I think the man is crazy in a smart way. You laugh at him until you realize what he's capable of doing to you." —Raven



JAYSON REIGN

HEIGHT: 5'9"

WEIGHT: 200

HOMETOWN: Chicago, IL

GREATEST MOMENT TO DATE:

Just getting invited to compete in the 2001 Super 8 tournament was an honor for him. He didn't disappoint with his performance, either, as he beat Tony Kozina in a thrilling quarterfinal match before bowing to eventual winner Low-Ki in the semis

HE DOES IT SO WELL: Suplexes, suplexes, suplexes. He is a master of many intricate versions of the maneuver

WHERE HE NEEDS TO IMPROVE:

He must get more exposure. Reign could be one of the top independent wrestlers in the country if he accepted more dates in different areas. Wrestling almost exclusively in the Midwest won't afford him the chance to become the star that he has the talent to someday be

PET FINISHER: Reign drop

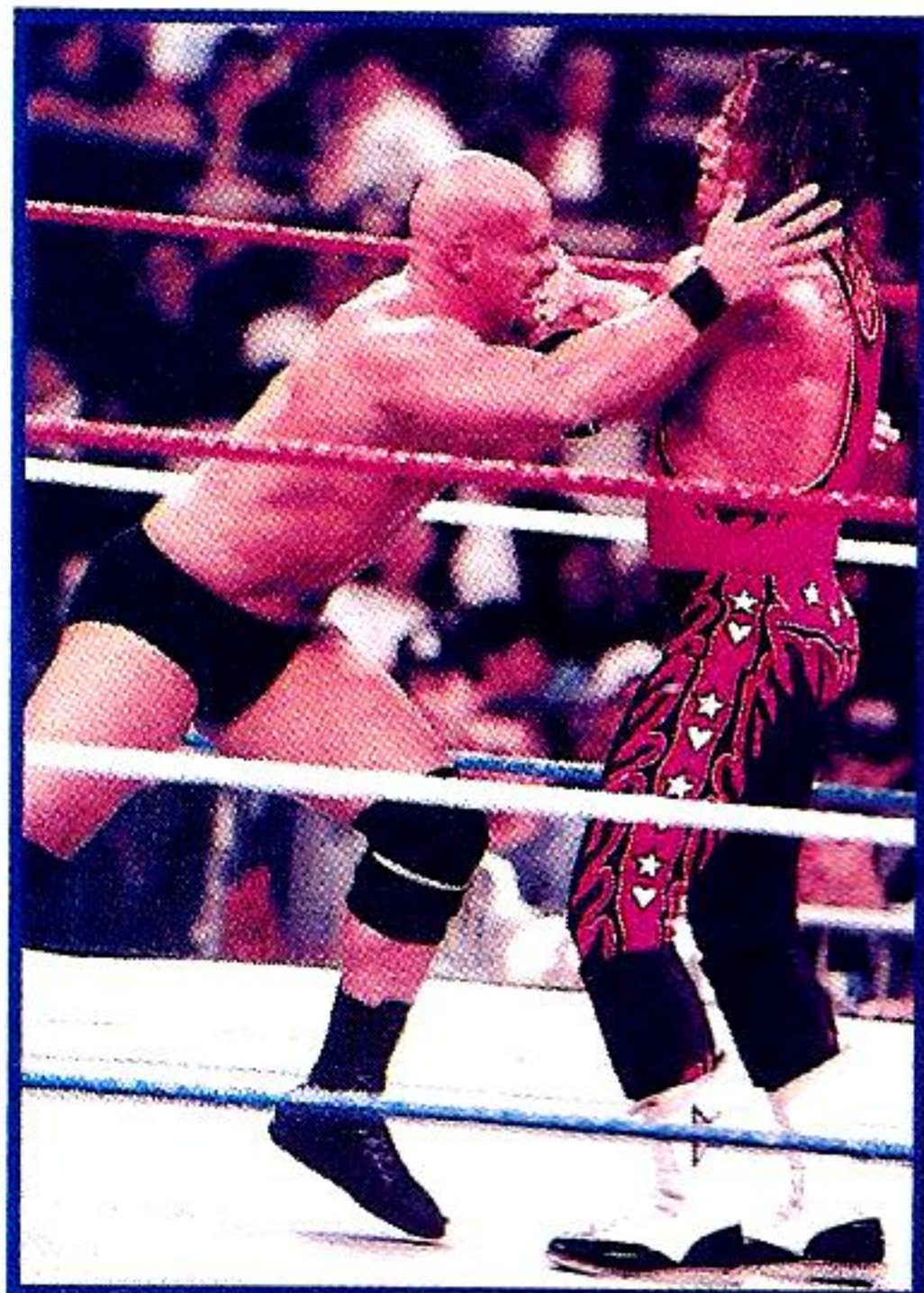
BIGGEST TEST TO DATE: Just getting out of bed the morning after a match with Low-Ki! His Super 8 rival has one of the most physically punishing styles of any wrestler in the U.S., and Reign not only survived matches with him—he learned a lot from battling him

OUTLOOK FOR 2002: We expect him to keep advancing on the independent scene and branch out a little more next year. He should remain the top junior heavyweight in the Midwest, and it wouldn't be out of the question for the WWF to take a look at him

QUICKIE EXPERT ANALYSIS: "I think Jayson realized early on that he'd have to compensate for his lack of size by being really innovative and unpredictable in the ring, and he is both of those things. He's a tough guy to scout."
—rival Christopher Daniels



wrestling timeline



JANUARY 19:

Steve Austin wins the Royal Rumble after eliminating Bret Hart. Austin was eliminated previously by Hart, but WWF officials did not see it.

JANUARY 25:

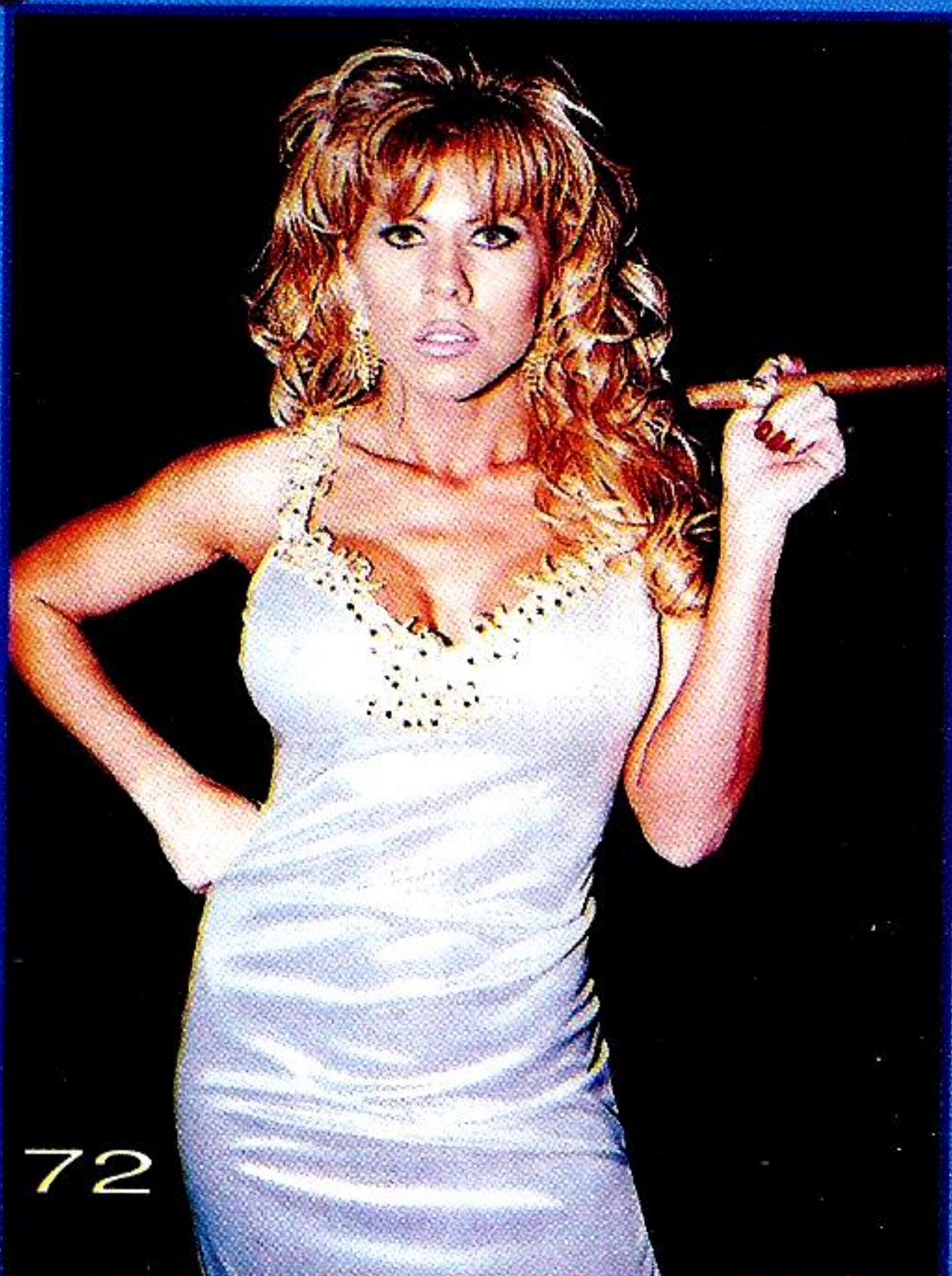
The New World Order promotes Souled Out, its first pay-per-view. Although the NWO is largely successful, the show itself is a critical failure.

FEBRUARY 13:

Shawn Michaels makes his famous speech about losing his smile as he relinquishes the WWF World belt on a live *Thursday Raw Thursday* due to a knee injury.

JANUARY 4:

Shotgun Saturday Night debuts at the Mirage Nightclub in New York. The Sisters of Love (The Headbangers dressed as nuns) make their first and last WWF appearance, and Marlena (Terri) bares her breasts (back to the camera) to help Goldust beat The Sultan (Rikishi).

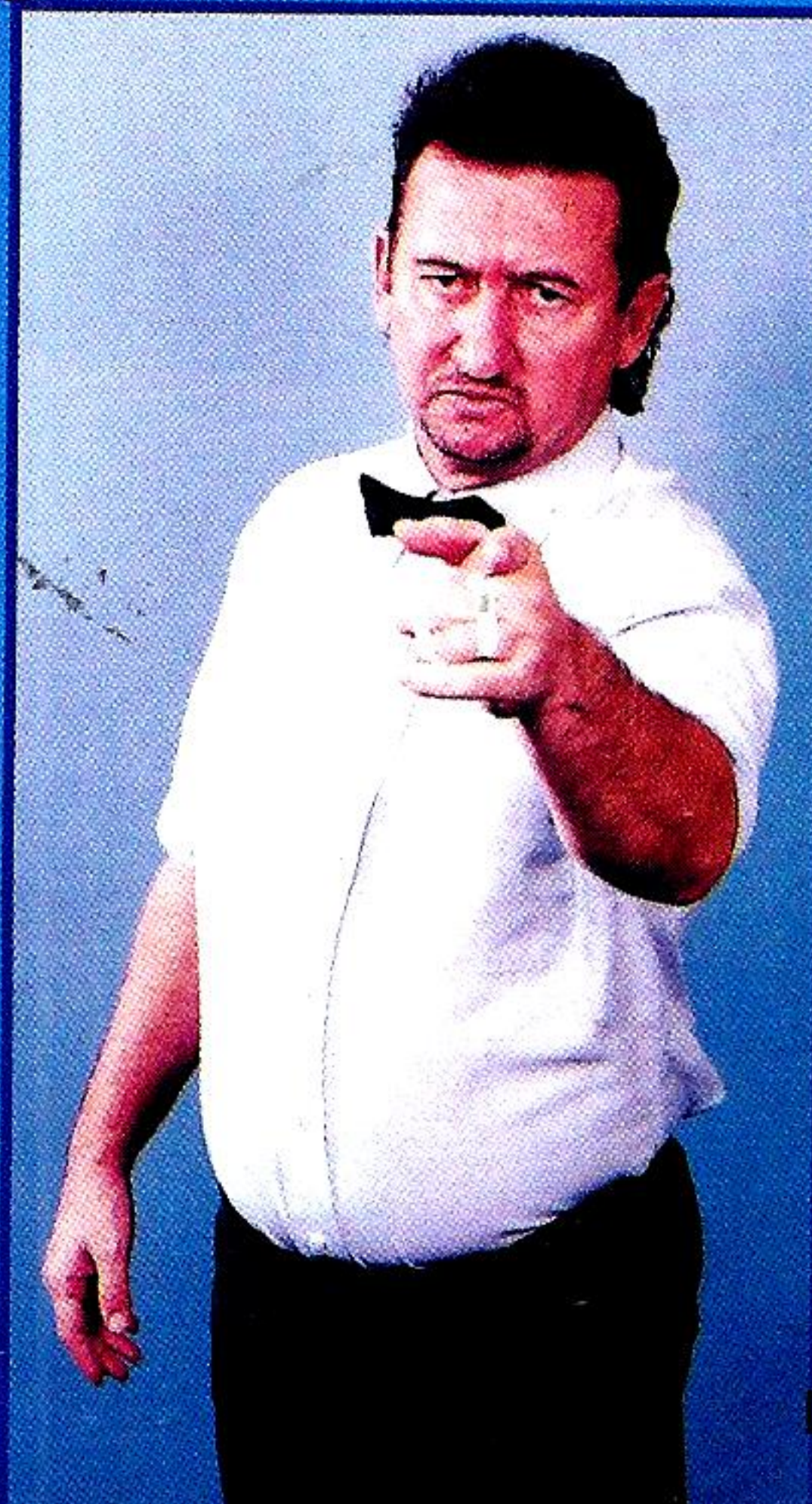


JANUARY 20:

Three months after losing to World champion Hulk Hogan at Halloween Havoc, Randy Savage returns to WCW at *Nitro* and stages a sit-in.

JANUARY 27:

Referee Randy Anderson is fired by Eric Bischoff after having declared the Steiners winners and new WCW World tag team champs in a match against The Outsiders at Souled Out. Anderson had come out of the stands to make a three-count when original ref Nick Patrick was knocked out. He would be reinstated several weeks later.



1997

In each issue, Inside Wrestling will journey back in time to look at how the major events of one particular year rocked the wrestling world

FEBRUARY 17:

After Bret Hart's WWF World title loss to Sid Vicious, the "Hitman" shocks everyone by physically and verbally attacking Vince McMahon.

FEBRUARY 24:

ECW wrestlers debut on *Raw* one week after Jerry Lawler's diatribe criticizing the federation. Paul Heyman serves as color commentator and heavily plugs Barely Legal, ECW's first PPV.

MARCH 25:

Two nights after WrestleMania XIII, Bret Hart turns heel in a speech filled with hatred and bitterness toward American fans. He then reunites with brother Owen and brother-in-law Davey Boy Smith to form The New Hart Foundation.

APRIL 11:

Vader is detained by authorities in Kuwait after he attacks Bassam Al Otham, host of *Good Morning Kuwait*, after taking offense to Otham's questions

FEBRUARY 23:

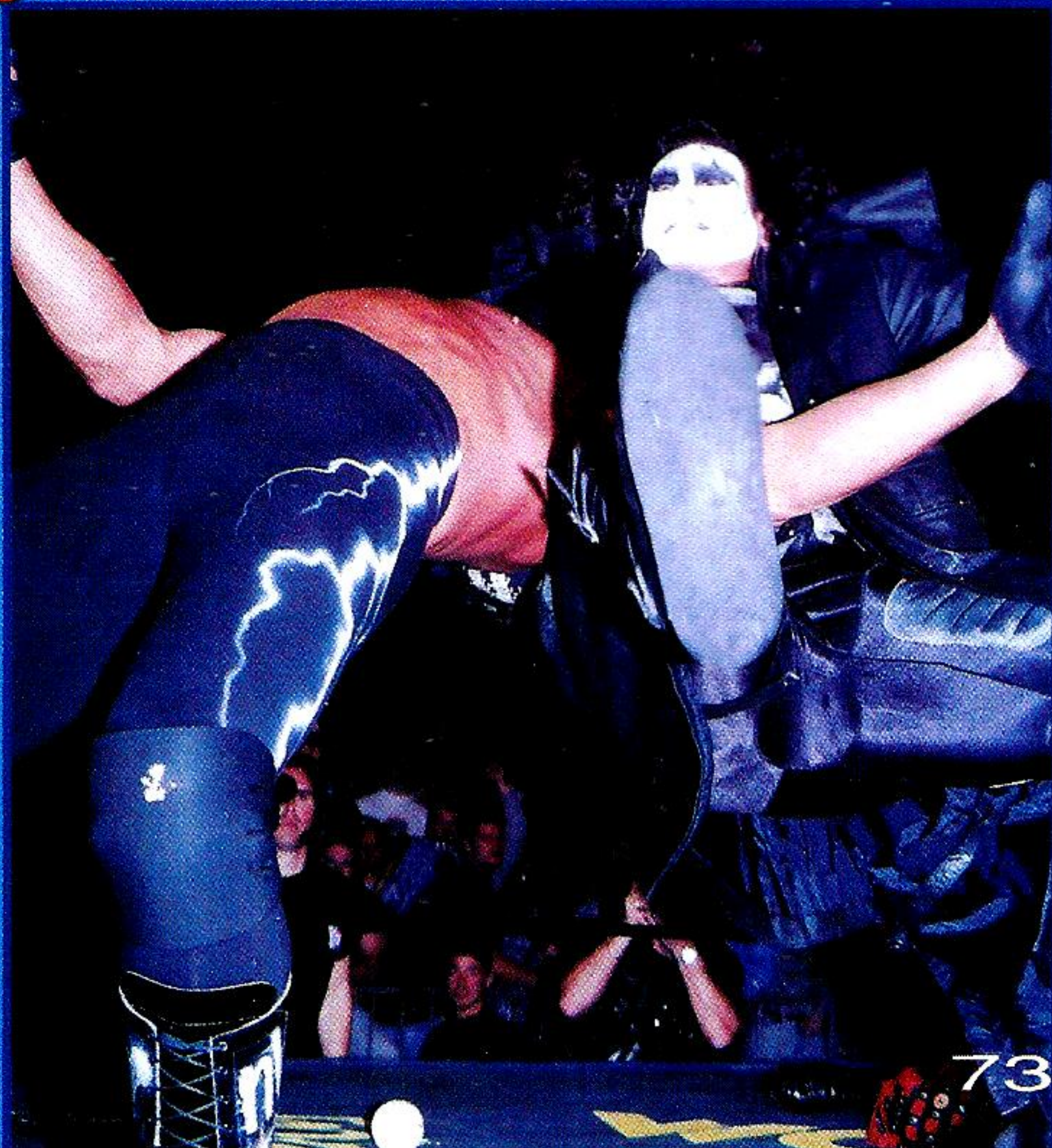
Randy Savage officially joins the NWO after attacking Roddy Piper and causing the "Rowdy Scot" to lose his SuperBrawl World title match to Hulk Hogan.

MARCH 16:

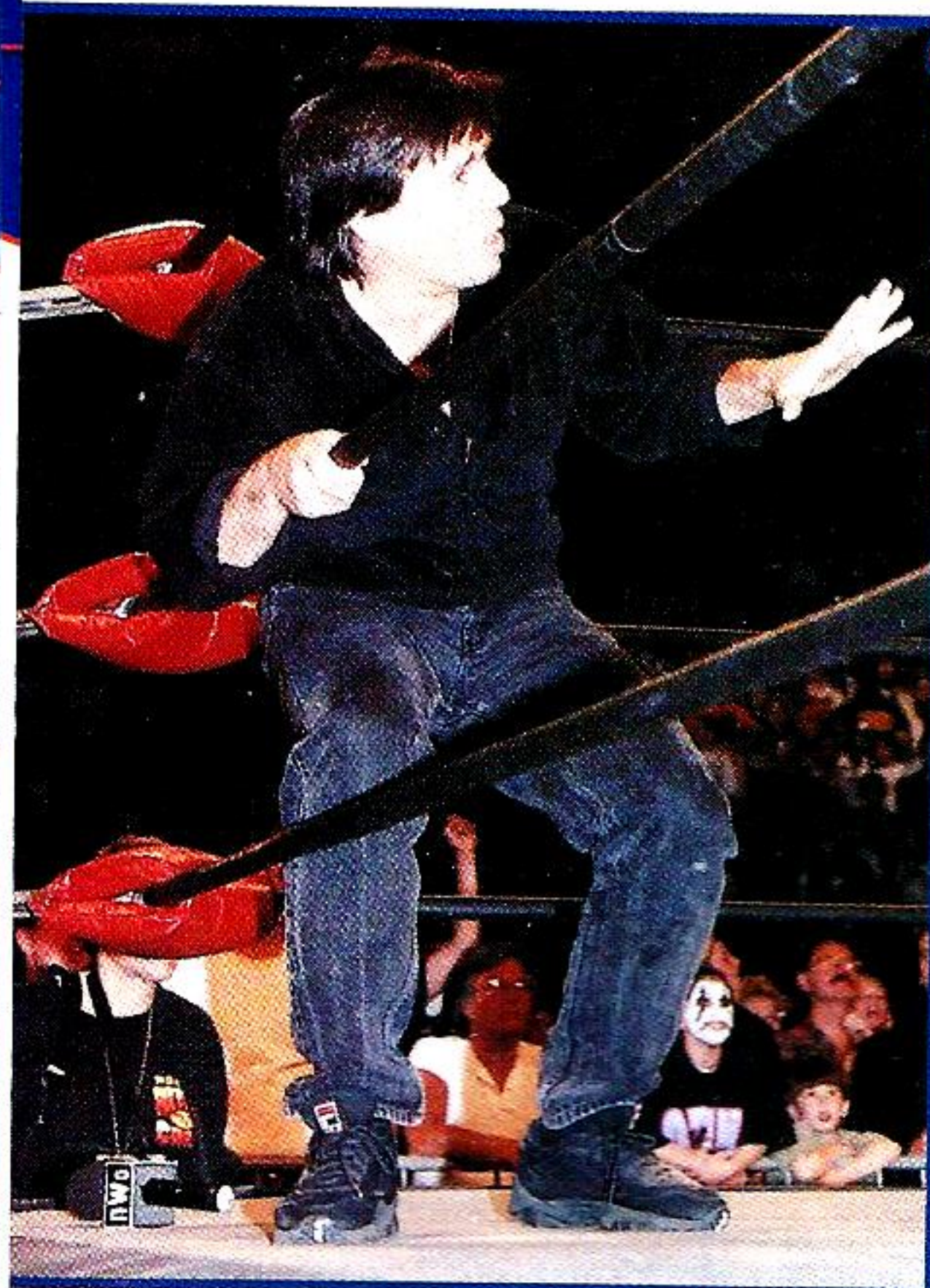
Sting makes his intentions and loyalties clear when he attacks his "comrades" in the NWO at Uncensored.

APRIL 6:

Ken Shamrock debuts in the WWF by defeating Vernon White.



wrestling timeline



APRIL 21:

Acting under the authority of Turner Sports President Dr. Harvey Schiller, recently named WCW Executive Committee Chairman J.J. Dillon tells an incredulous Eric Bischoff live on *Nitro* that he no longer has official authority within WCW.

MAY 12:

Rob Van Dam officially becomes "Mr. Monday Night" when he debuts alongside Jerry Lawler on *Raw*. He defeats Matt Hardy in his first WWF outing, although he never signs a contract with the company.

MAY 5:

The WWF airs an up-close and personal interview with Goldust in which he reveals his true identity to be Dustin Rhodes and speaks of his estranged relationship with father Dusty.

APRIL 11:

Hulk Hogan is pinned by Jacques Rougeau in a non-title house show match in Montreal. The bout is never acknowledged on TV.

APRIL 13:

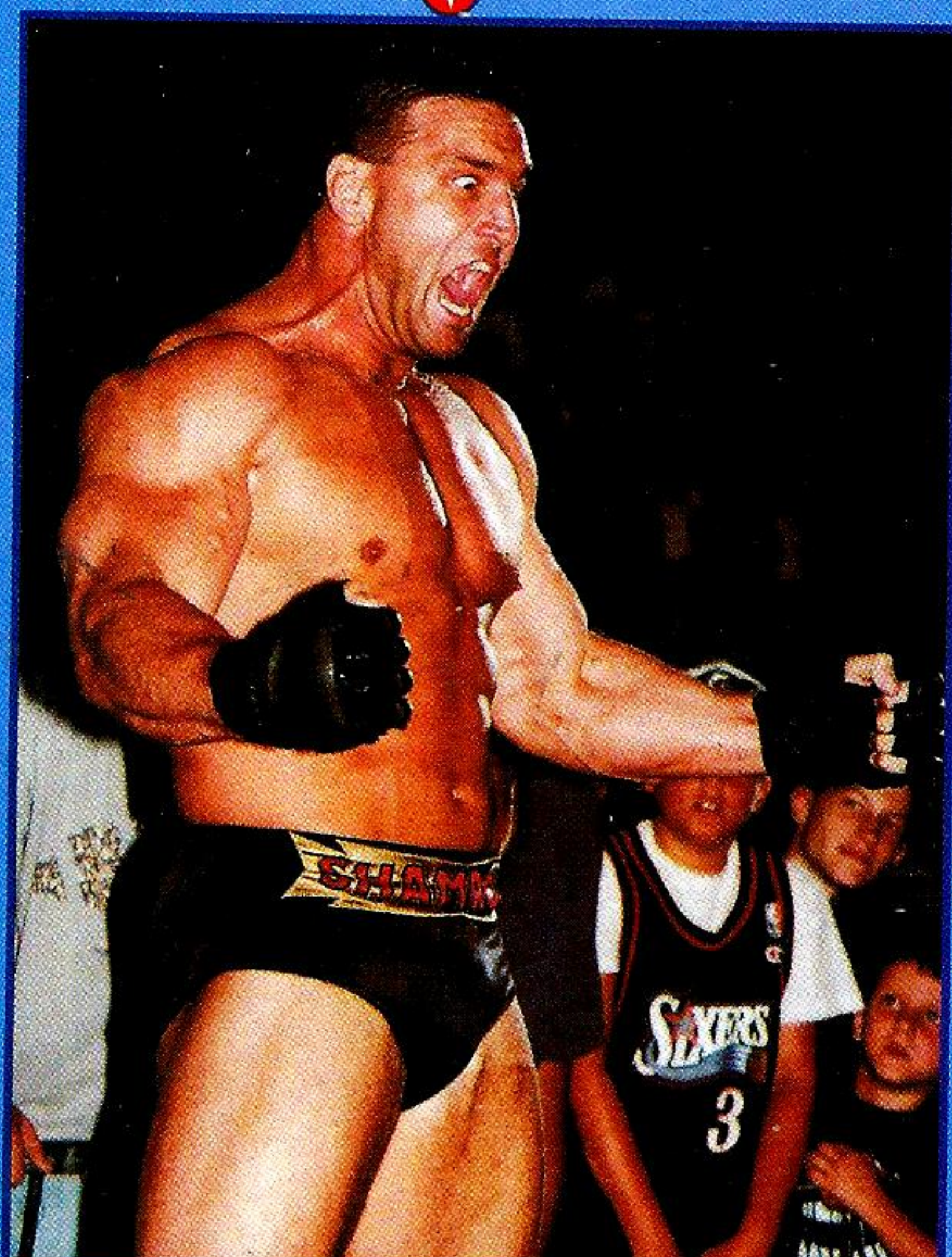
ECW finally debuts on pay-per-view with *Barely Legal*. The event garners an impressive .26 buy rate.

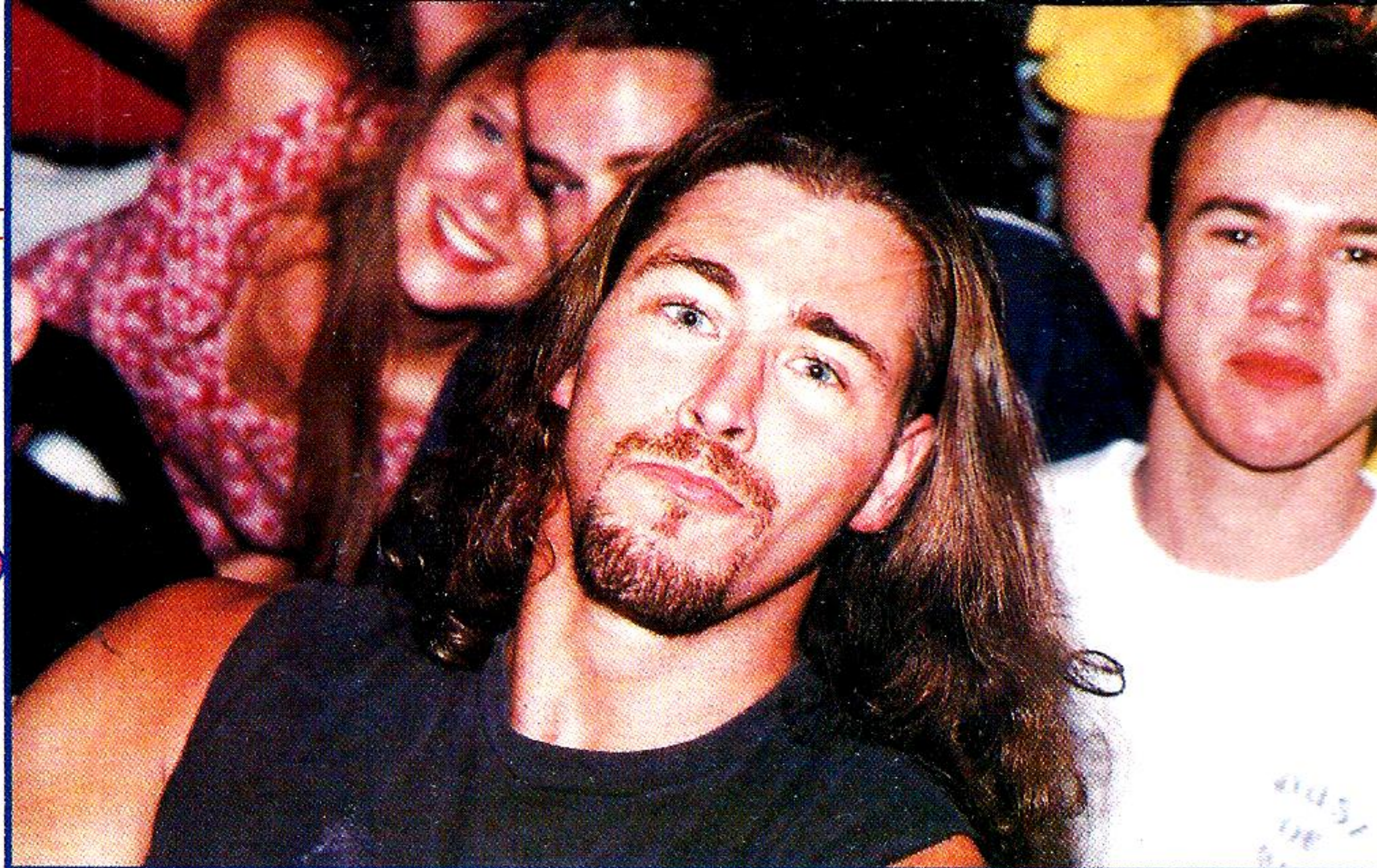
MAY 2:

A new Triple Threat is formed when Bam Bam Bigelow returns to ECW and, along with Shane Douglas and Chris Candido, attacks Mahoney.

MAY 11:

Ken Shamrock makes his pay-per-view debut at the WWF's *In Your House* by forcing Vader to submit.





MAY 17:

Terry Funk drops a guardrail on Stevie Richards' neck, temporarily paralyzing him. Richards is told to stay out of the ring for four to six weeks. He doesn't heed the warning.

MAY 30:

Stevie Richards suffers a broken vertebra during a tag team match pitting him and Raven against The Eliminators. It would be his last ECW bout before his jump to WCW.

JUNE 9:

Bret Hart and Shawn Michaels brawl backstage before a *Raw* telecast. Michaels temporarily leaves the federation as a result, vowing never to return.

MAY 18:

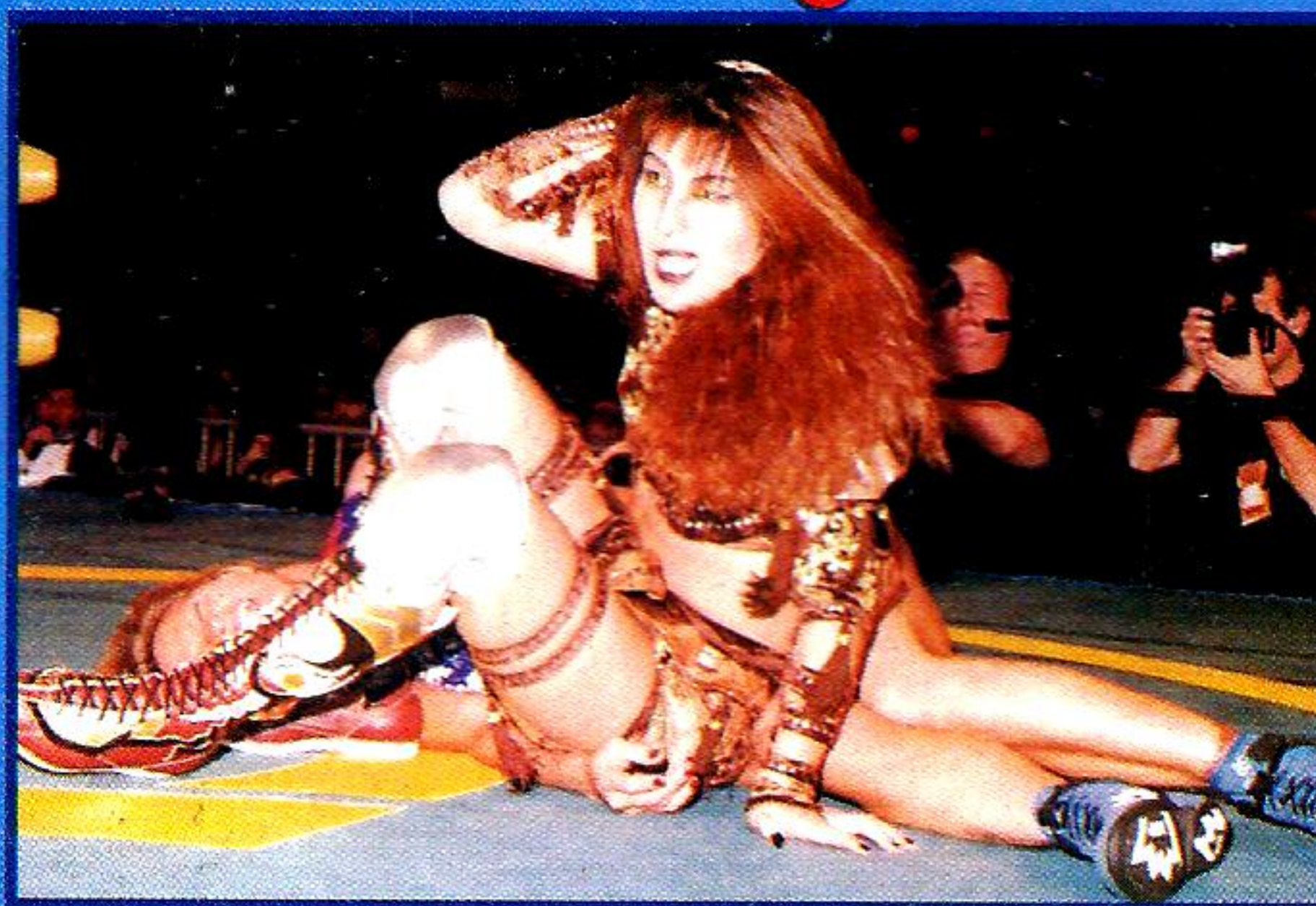
Ric Flair returns to active competition at Slamboree in Charlotte, after being sidelined eight months with a torn left rotator cuff. He, Kevin Greene, and Roddy Piper defeat Kevin Nash, Scott Hall, and Syxx.

JUNE 7:

A WCW-bound Raven drops a loser-leaves-ECW match to Tommy Dreamer at the ECW Arena. On the same card, Jerry Lawler enters enemy territory when he, Sabu, Rob Van Dam, and Bill Alfonso attack Dreamer and nearly every ECW wrestler.

JUNE 15:

Madusa loses a retirement match to WCW women's champ Akira Hokuto at The Great American Bash.



wrestling timeline

JUNE 23:

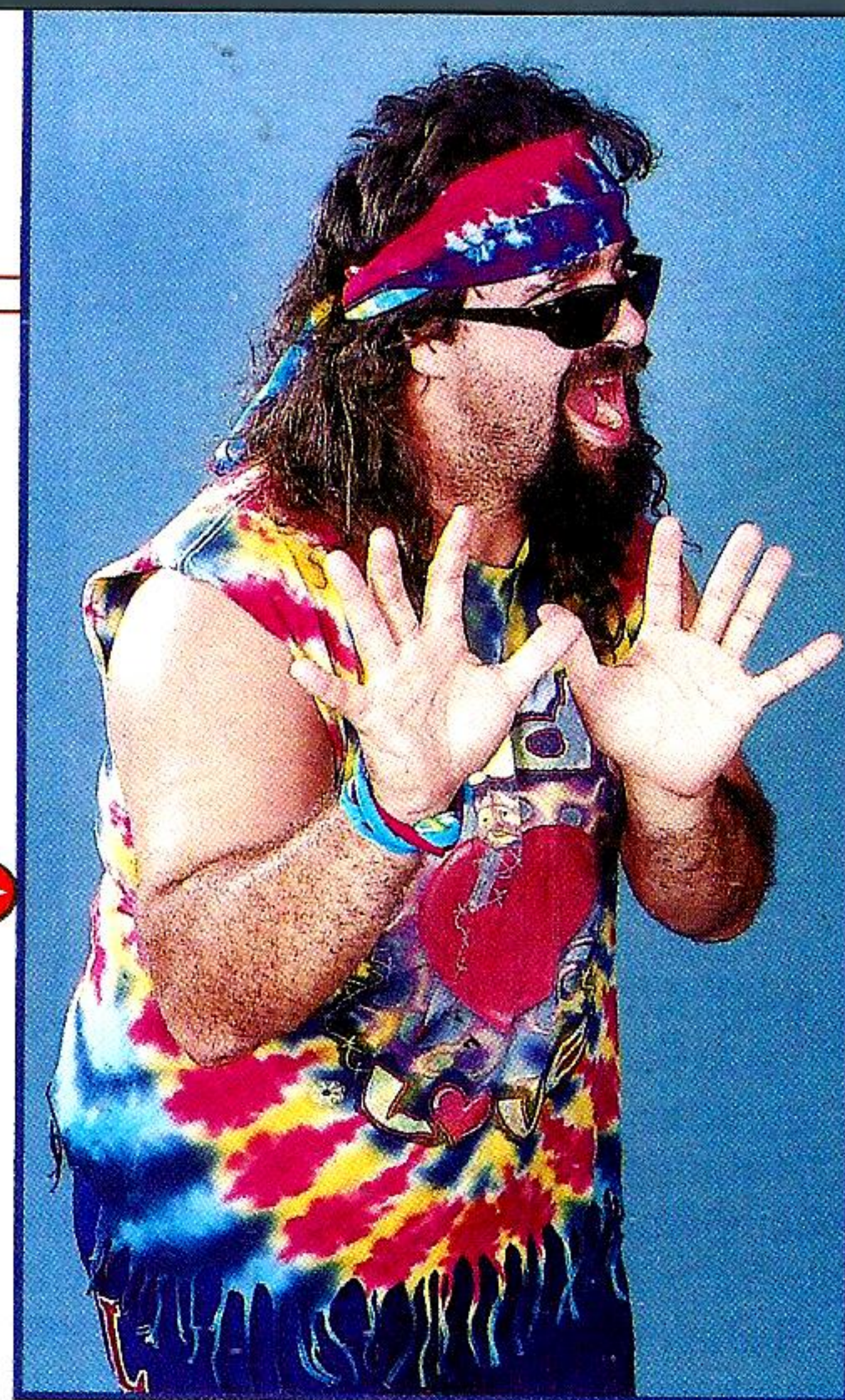
The long friendship of Ric Flair and Roddy Piper ends when the "Nature Boy" and his Horsemen attack the "Rowdy Scot."

JULY 13:

Curt Hennig wrestles his first match in nearly four years and turns against partner Dallas Page during their Bash at the Beach match with the NWO's Scott Hall and Randy Savage. On the same card, Dennis Rodman makes his wrestling debut when he and Hulk Hogan lose the main event to Lex Luger and The Giant.

JULY 14:

Another one of Mick Foley's alter egos, Dude Love, makes his debut in the WWF and helps Steve Austin win the WWF World tag team title.



JULY 11:

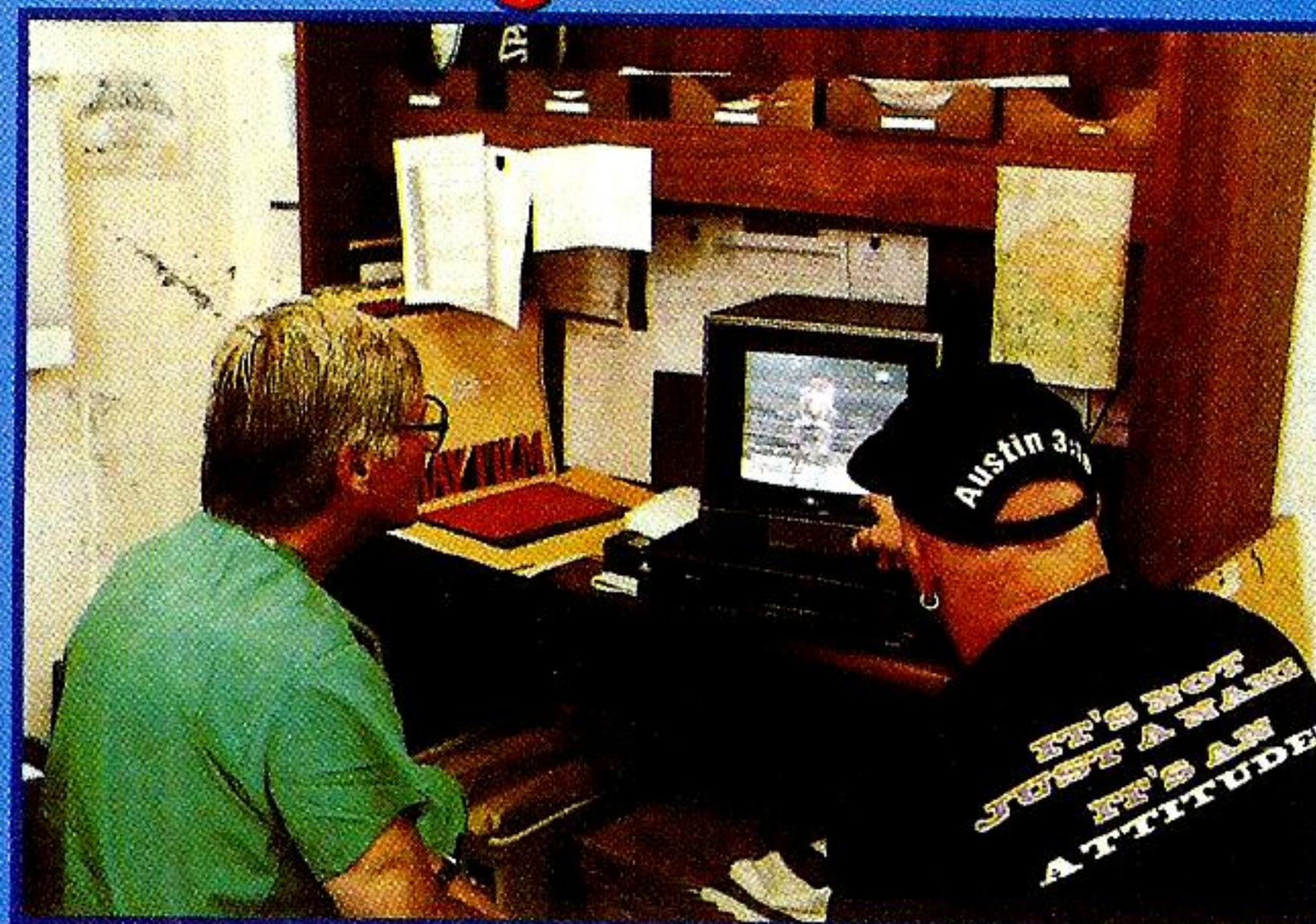
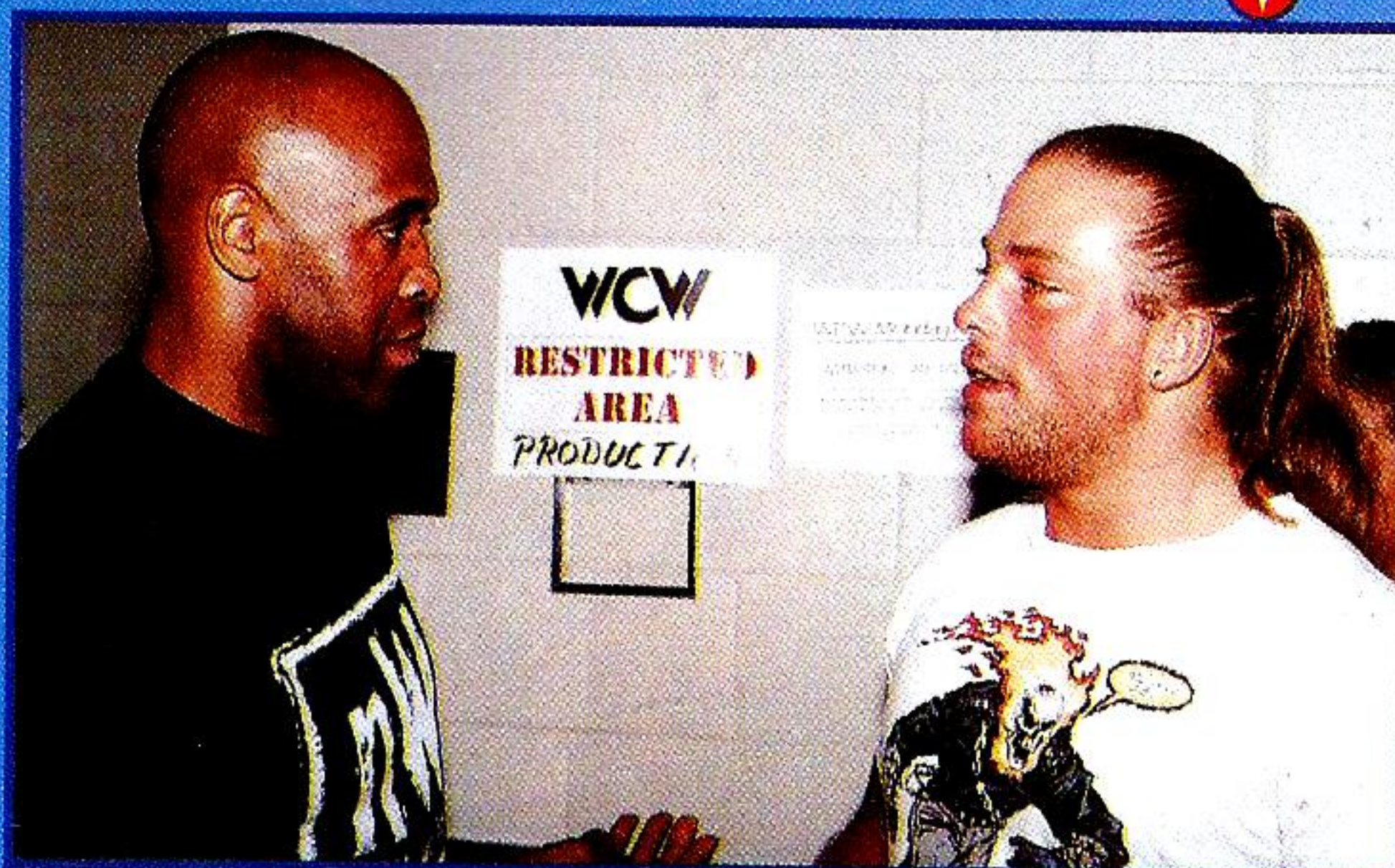
King Kong Bundy attempts a kneedrop on Primo Carnera III at an independent show in Schenectady, New York. Bundy's weight causes two wooden support beams to snap and the ring sags. Nevertheless, Bundy goes on to win.

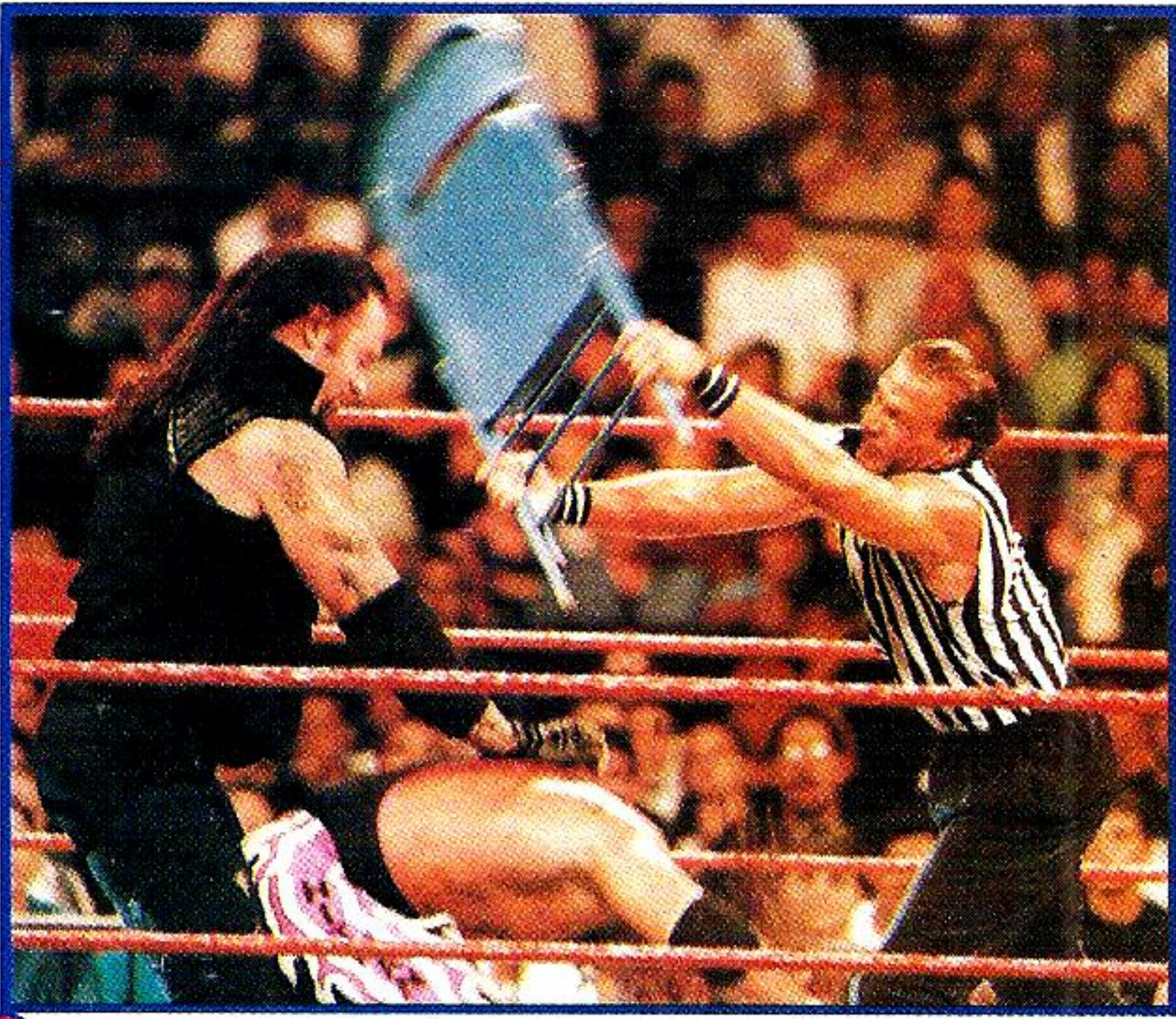
JULY 14:

"Mr. Monday Night" Rob Van Dam is seen backstage at Nitro. Pictures are taken of him talking to the NWO's Vincent.

AUGUST 3:

Steve Austin suffers spinal shock syndrome at SummerSlam, a result of a tombstone piledriver from Owen Hart. Austin would go on to win the Intercontinental title, but his career is put in jeopardy.





AUGUST 4:

Shawn Michaels turns heel again after inadvertently helping Bret Hart win the WWF World title a day earlier at SummerSlam.

AUGUST 16:

Japanese woman wrestler Plum Mariko, 29, dies as the result of head injuries suffered in a tag team match the previous day.

SEPTEMBER 5:

Tod Gordon and ECW sever ties amid allegations that Gordon acted as a "mole" within the federation he founded to help supply talent to WCW.

SEPTEMBER 14:

Curt Hennig turns against The Four Horsemen and joins the NWO at Fall Brawl.

AUGUST 11:

Rick Rude returns to the WWF to serve as Shawn Michaels "insurance man" (bodyguard).

AUGUST 25:

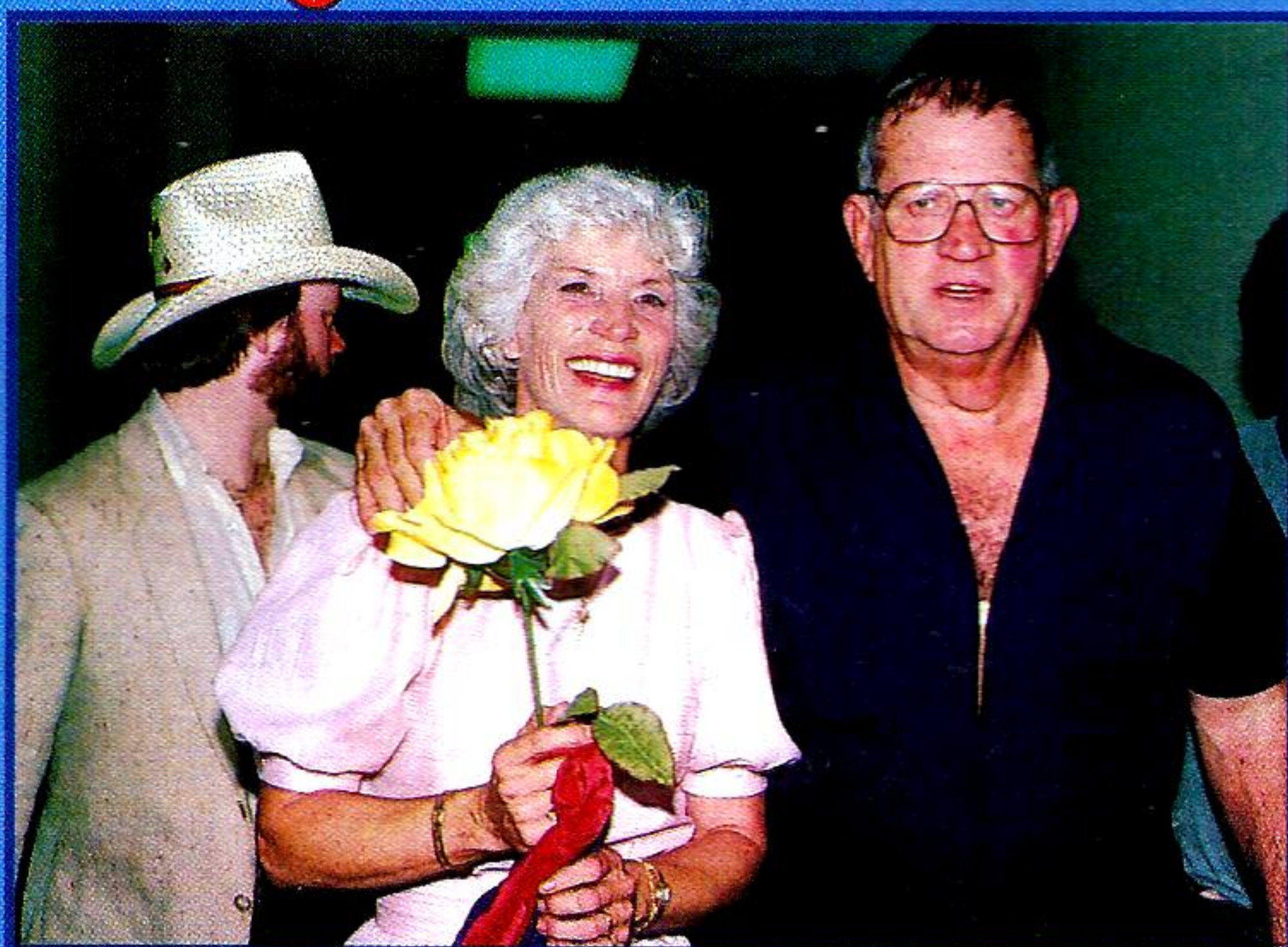
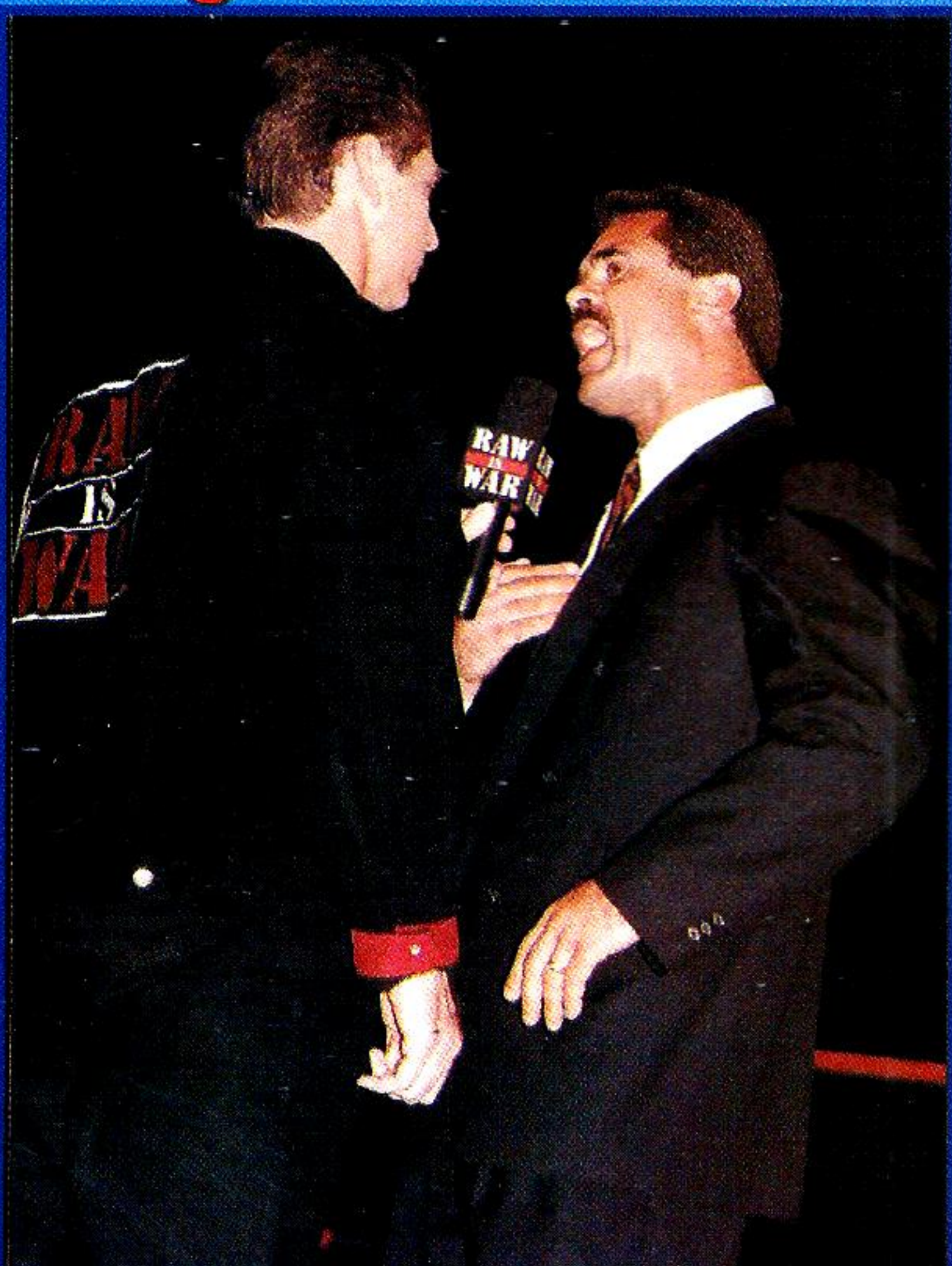
Arn Anderson offers an emotional speech as he publicly retires and turns over the Horsemen's "Enforcer" mantle to Curt Hennig.

SEPTEMBER 10:

Seven weeks after suffering a mild stroke and having doctors discover that he's suffering from lung cancer, Fritz Von Erich dies at age 68.

SEPTEMBER 19:

Marc Mero makes his return to the WWF seven months after undergoing reconstructive surgery on his left knee. His attitude is reflected in his new nickname, "Marvelous."



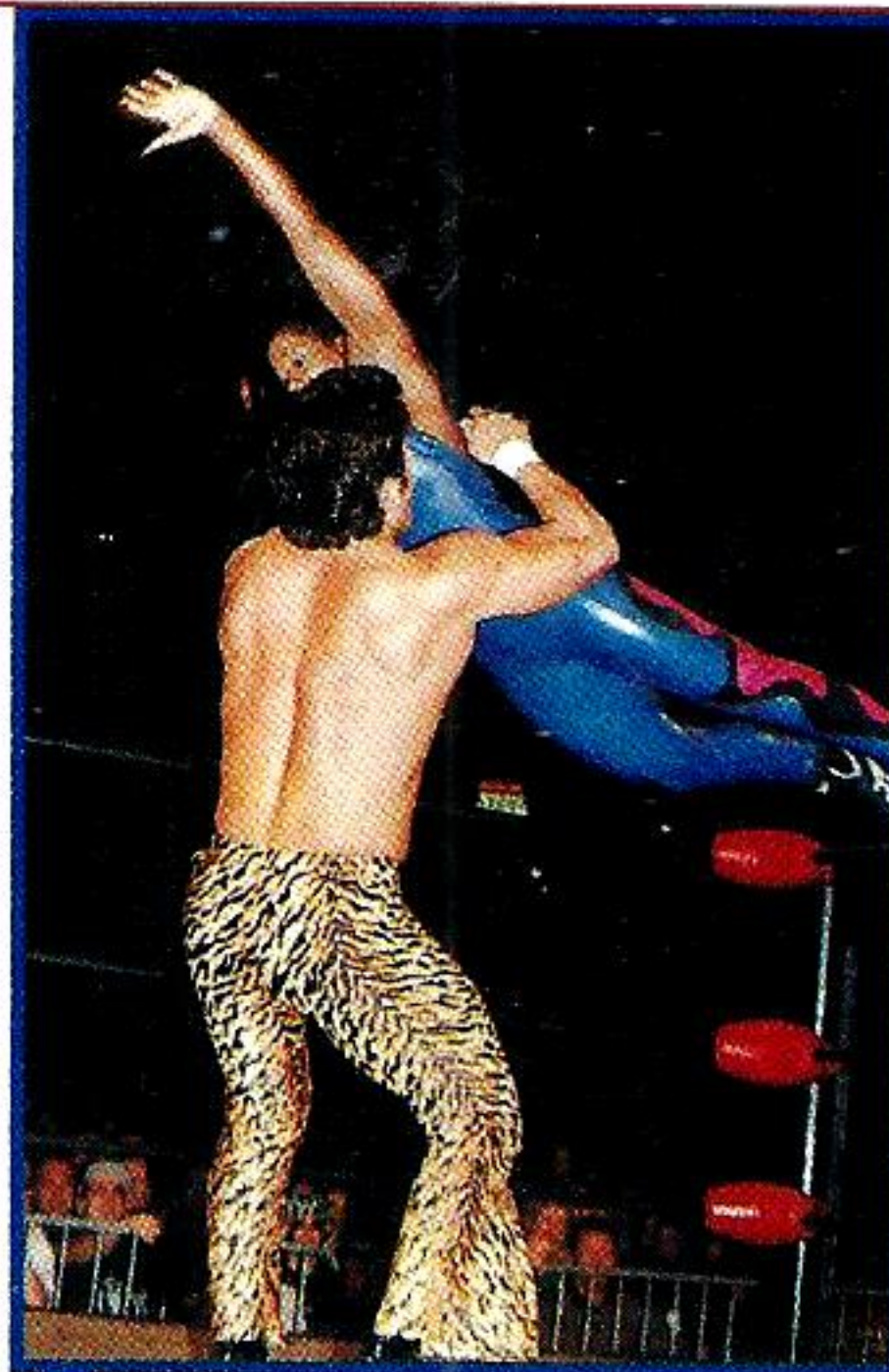
wrestling timeline

SEPTEMBER 29:

Ric Flair officially disbands The Four Horsemen.

OCTOBER 20:

Less than four months after being fired from the Horsemen in WCW, Jeff Jarrett returns to the WWF on *Raw*.



OCTOBER 26:

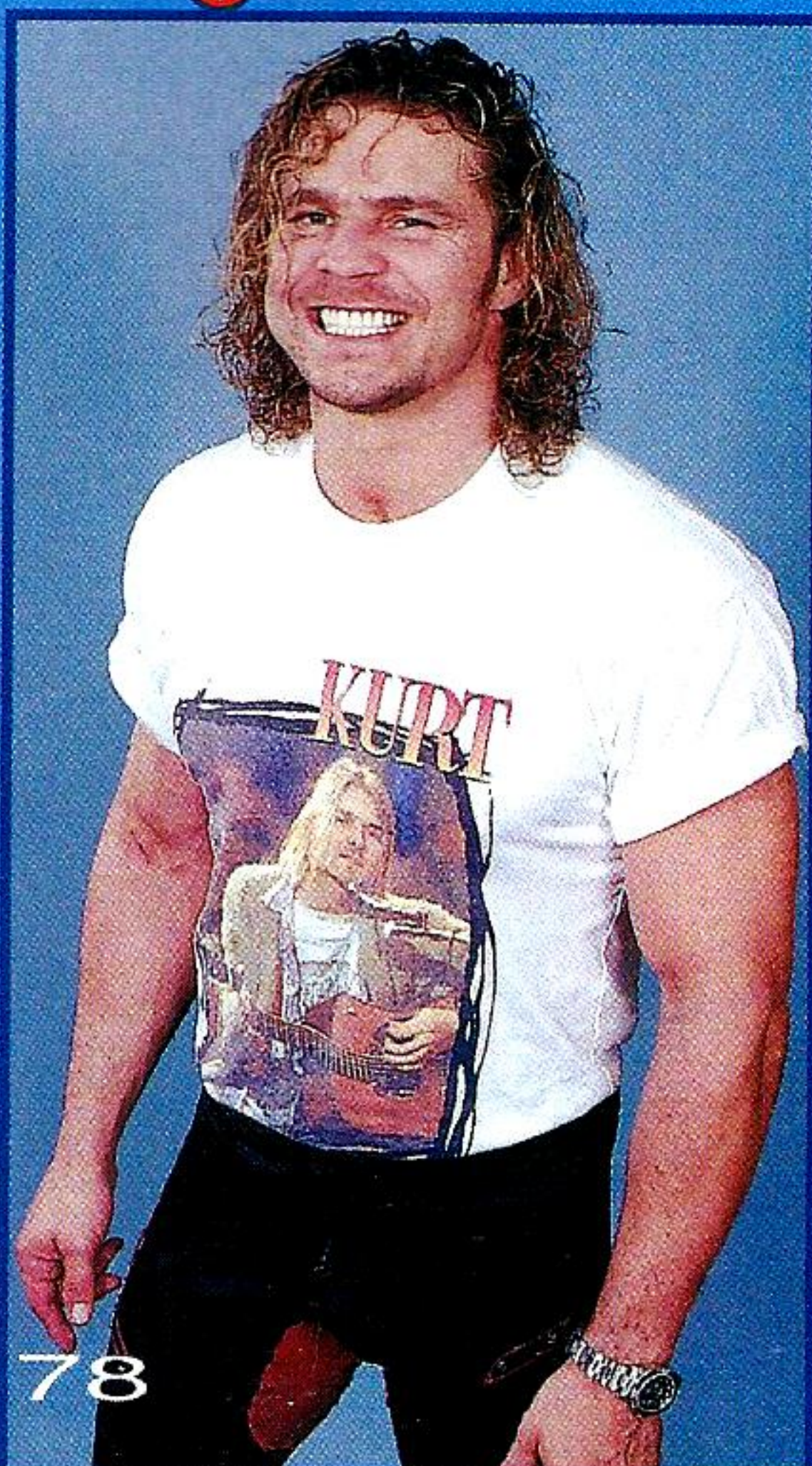
Jacquelyn upends WCW TV champion Disco Inferno in a non-title bout at Halloween Havoc.

NOVEMBER 17:

Rick Rude shocks the wrestling world when he shows up with Hulk Hogan on *Nitro* 24 hours after appearing at a WWF show. On the same night, Rude appears on *Raw* in an episode taped the week before. And on the same *Raw*, Vince McMahon defends his decision that resulted in the Survivor Series controversy by concluding, "Bret screwed Bret."

OCTOBER 5:

Brian Pillman is found dead in his hotel room in Bloomington, Minnesota. He wrestled his last match the night before in St. Paul, where he lost to Goldust. The Hennepin County Coroner later releases a report that reveals his death was a result of arteriosclerotic heart disease.

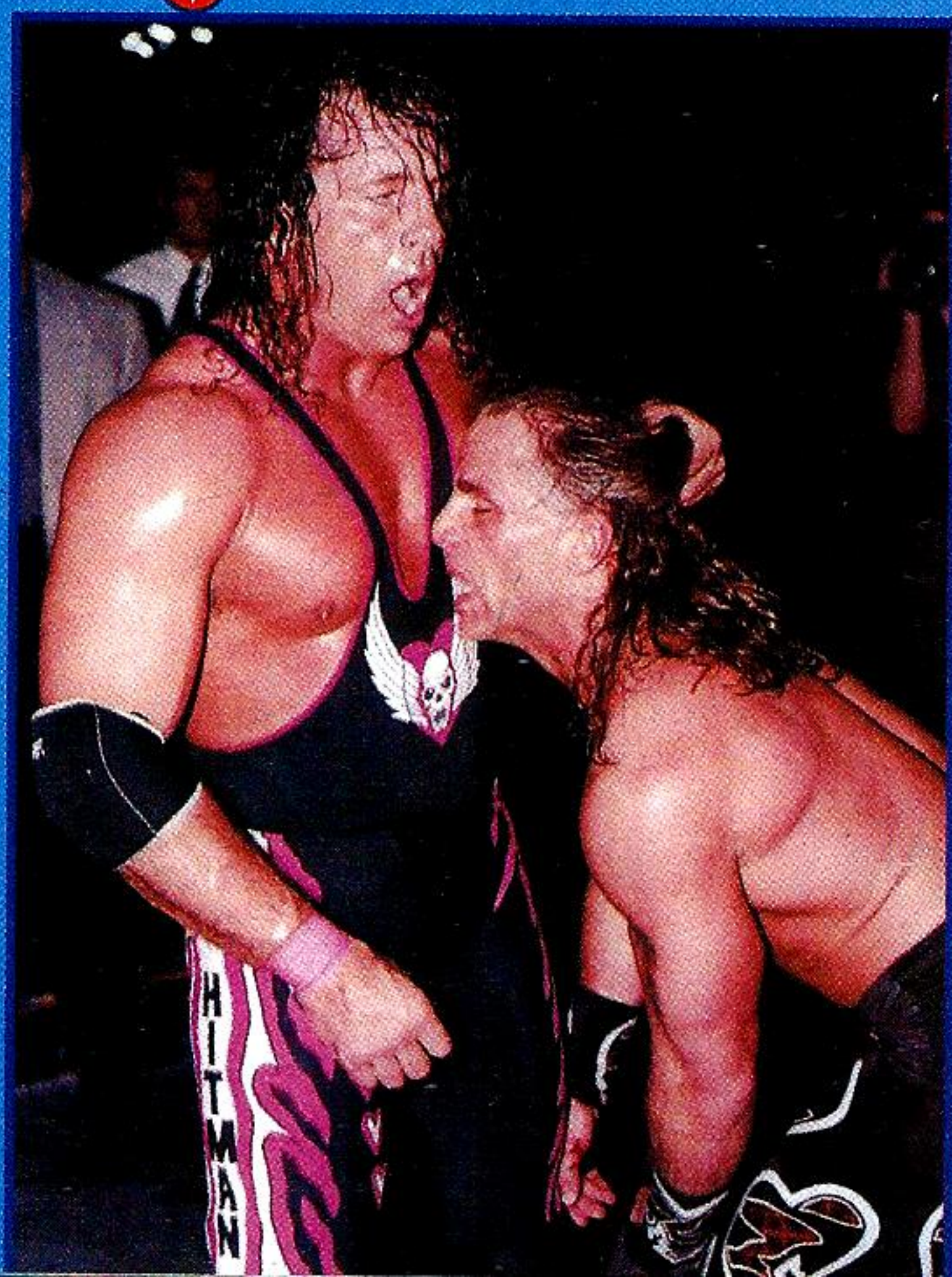


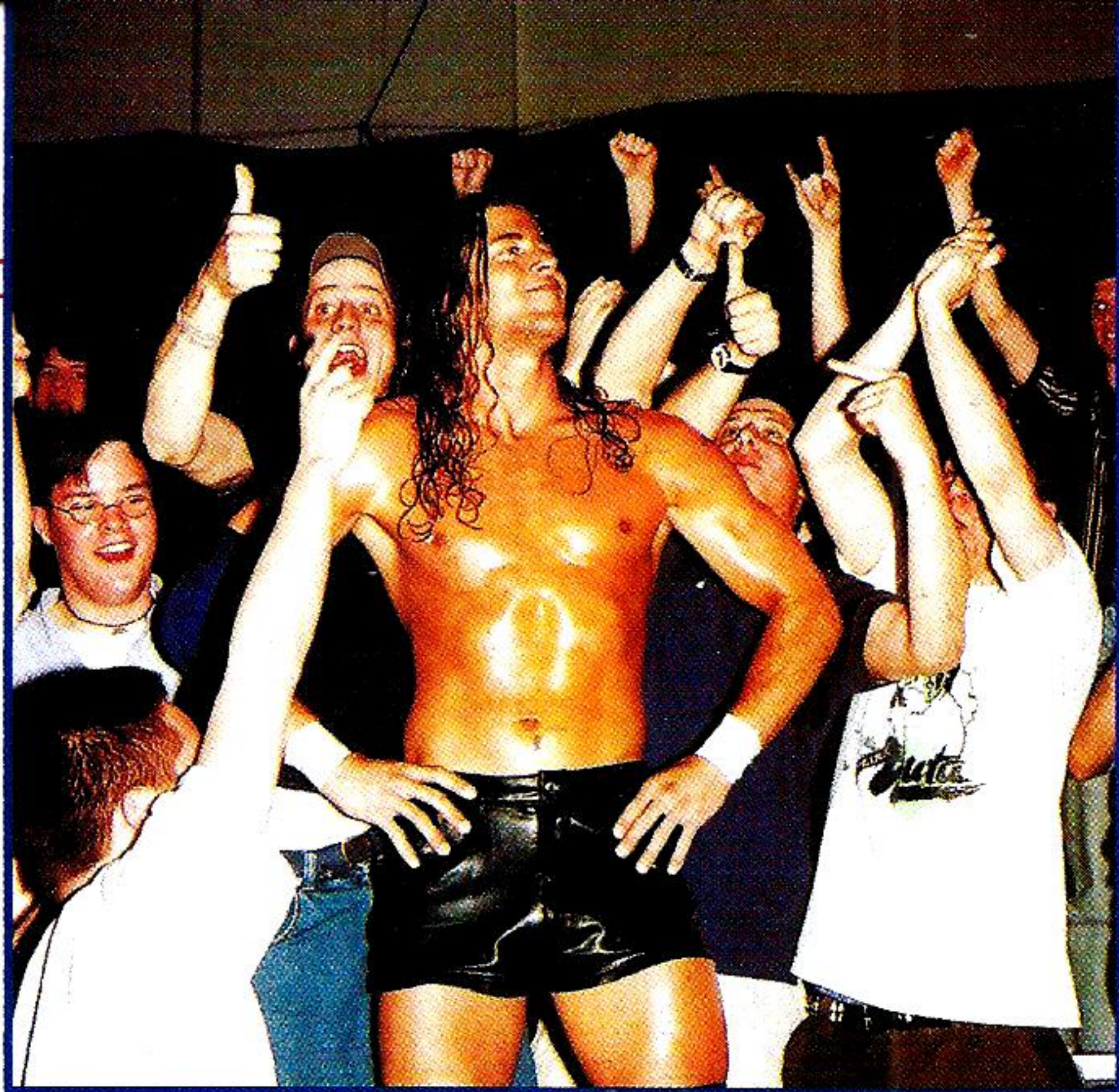
OCTOBER 26:

Steve Austin returns to action with a victory over Hunter Hearst Helmsley.

NOVEMBER 9:

Bret Hart attacks Vince McMahon following his infamous WWF World title loss to Shawn Michaels at Survivor Series. Hart had just signed a three-year contract with rival WCW and was convinced that McMahon had colluded with referee Earl Hebner to cause his defeat.





NOVEMBER 30:

Weeks after announcing his retirement from wrestling and his intentions to start a video game business, Stevie Richards returns to ECW at November to Remember, ECW's third pay-per-view.

1997

DECEMBER 15:

Bret Hart makes his first WCW appearance when he accepts J.J. Dillon's invitation to referee the match between Eric Bischoff and Larry Zbyszko at Starrcade.

NOVEMBER 23:

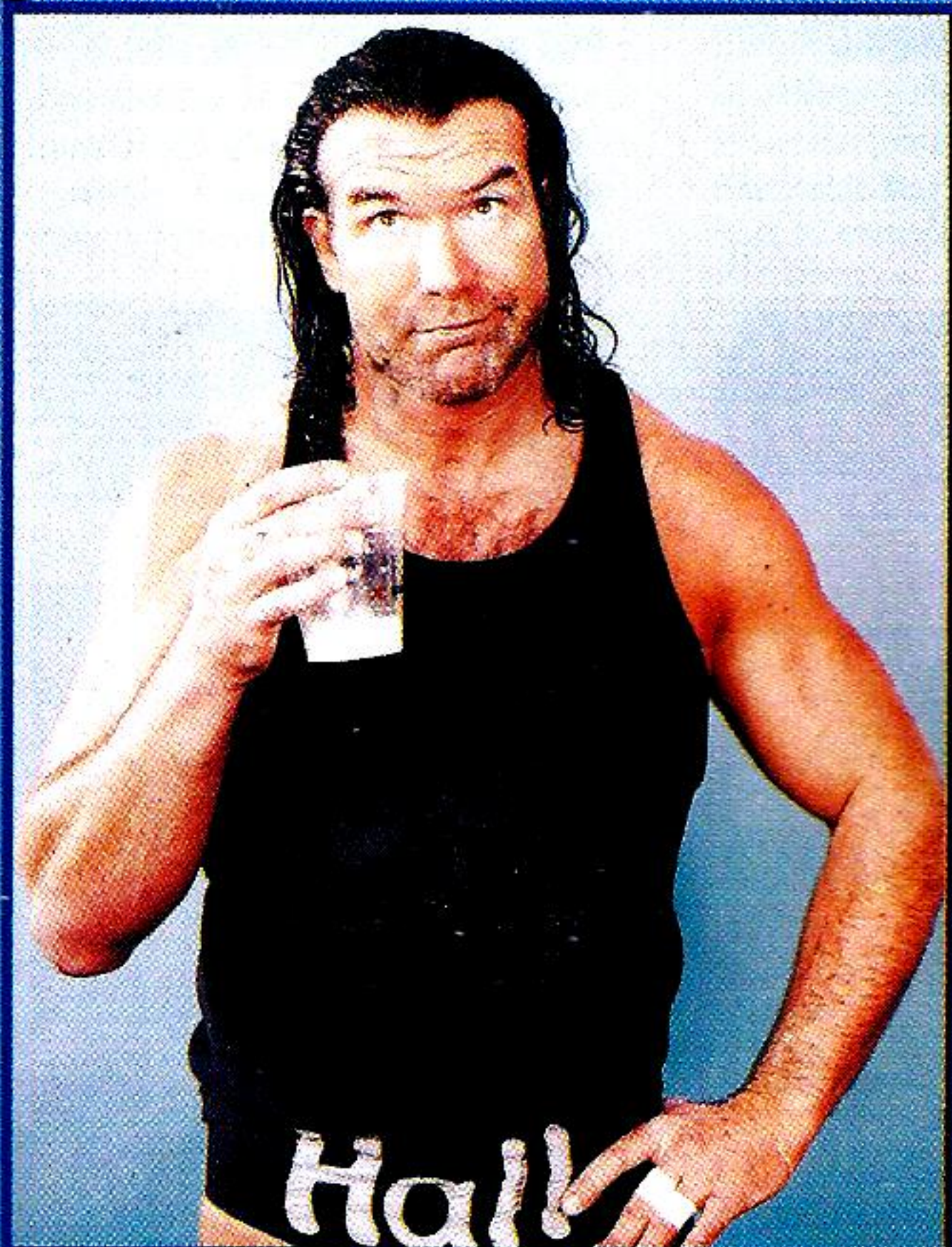
Scott Hall wins the 60-man battle royal in the main event of World War III.

DECEMBER 14-15:

The main events of WWF cards in Memphis, Tennessee, and Little Rock, Arkansas, are canceled when it is determined that the fans had become too unruly. The cancellations spur "fan riots," according to published reports.

DECEMBER 28:

Sting emerges from a self-imposed 15-month exile to beat Hulk Hogan for the WCW World title at Starrcade. Hogan seems to win the match when Nick Patrick makes a three-count, but Bret Hart (a special referee that night) claims the count was fast and orders the match restarted. Hogan eventually submits to the scorpion deathlock.



FREE

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WRESTLER OF THE WEEK

Law Luger did not lose a match since he was 19 when he lost to Hulk Hogan. Luger, who has been in the WWF since 1990, has won the WWF Championship twice. He is now the WWF's most popular wrestler.

MATCH OF THE WEEK

Real "Hulk" Hogan vs. "The Rock" Dwayne Johnson. Hogan, who has been in the WWF since 1982, has won the WWF Championship four times. Johnson, who has been in the WWF since 1999, has won the WWF Championship once.

YAY AND NAY

A "Yes" to the WWF's new pay-per-view schedule. **N** "No" to the WWF's new pay-per-view schedule.

WWF STARS' CAR FLIPS: AVOID SERIOUS INJURIES

C "Dustin" Diamond vs. "The Rock" Dwayne Johnson. Diamond, who has been in the WWF since 1990, has won the WWF Championship once. Johnson, who has been in the WWF since 1999, has won the WWF Championship once.



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sincerely yours

(Continued from page 5)

underdog he was and how wonderful it is that he made it big by working so hard, and he's not telling all his opponents that they will "feel the bang!" So now he thinks he's a self-help guru/motivational speaker type. As a certain someone likes to say, that's not a bad thing, it's ... a good thing!

GRADY WHITMAN
Harrisburg, PA

DESERVED PRAISE

I think it's time we gave credit to the man who is the most underrated wrestler in the WWF right now, and that's Tajiri. No one thought he could make it there because he's so small compared to most of the WWF guys, but he continues to prove everyone wrong. I can't remember him having a bad match so far in the WWF, and the crowds still react positively to him, especially when he catches somebody in the tarantula or he spits that awful green mist in somebody's face. He's already won the WWF light heavyweight title, the WCW cruiserweight title, and the WCW U.S. belt, and he did it in less than a year.

I am sorry to see that he won't be hanging out in the commissioner's office with William Regal anymore (they were hysterical together), but I'm sure he'll do a lot more to entertain us in 2002. I'd love to see him have a long feud with RVD!

R.J. HAYS
Conran, MO

LOGIC ANYONE?

Sometimes I can't figure out what's going on in the WWF. How is it that Vince McMahon can just go on TV and make matches whenever he wants to when he has a commissioner, Mick Foley, whose job it is to do just that? Wasn't it a big deal when Foley got the commissioner job the first time that Vince had to abide by his rulings? I know Vince does what he does because he's Vince McMahon, but what's the point of having a commissioner if Vince has just as much authority to book matches? And if Foley is going to be the commissioner, shouldn't he at least be present at all televised WWF events?

JAKE BENDER
Ardmore, PA



Tajiri (shown against Justin Credible) is unlikely to reach main-event status in the WWF, but he has amassed a nice fan base. Reader R.J. Hays calls him the WWF's most underrated star.

Speak out publicly against his or her boss as long as he or she is still drawing a big check—especially now that the WWF's the only place Tazz could ply his trade and still make a terrific living doing it.

So I can only point to history for proof. Tazz' WWF career was seemingly only minutes old before stories began to circulate about his notorious "attitude." Scuttlebutt had it that he was more concerned about working in his signature maneuvers than putting over opponents.

Then we heard he'd reacted negatively when asked to cease performing so many suplexes in the ring. Was the WWF looking out for the physical welfare of its performers or trying to emasculate a wrestler who was fiercely protective of his professional image?

Anyway, the optimists' view says the WWF had finally wised up. Those who bought into this nonsense were obviously swayed by another WWF mandate that all but outlawed maneuvers—

such as the tombstone piledriver—that ended with an opponent landing on his head.

Yet Tazz' sudden metamorphosis into an on-air personality suggests the latter. Now, Tazz can cut a pretty good promo. But we're not talking about a Shane Douglas or Ric Flair, legendary talkers whose gift of gab and desperate need for down time would make them logical choices for the job. We're talking about "The Human Suplex Machine," somebody who, against the odds, climbed to the top through excellent wrestling and a compelling mystique.

But rather than utilize the skills, mystique, and momentum he'd gained as ECW World heavyweight champion, the WWF turned those very attributes against Tazz in a laughable feud with Jerry Lawler, an opponent old enough to be his father, and a man whose best days in the ring happened many years ago.

Compared to his current matches, Tazz displayed a decent amount of offense against Lawler, but the net



The brief feud he had with Tajiri over the summer was interesting, but Tazz' career has been going downhill since. Frank Krewda can't understand why he has been buried.

result of the feud left him looking like a second-rate wrestler from a second-rate promotion, a classic schoolyard bully who was easily outfoxed by one of the oldest performers in the WWF.

Luckily, Tazz had his announcing career to fall back on. And to his credit, I think Tazz has done a commendable job as color man for *Smackdown* and as the hard-edged trainer for the reality MTV show *Tough Enough*. But, again, it appears the WWF is using both vehicles to grind Tazz down even more.

Just look at *Raw* and *Smackdown*. When he's not playing Austin's lackey or serving as a faceless extra in all those doomed Alliance skits, Tazz is losing to Maven—the same

wet-behind-the-ears *Tough Enough* entrant he schooled for 15 weeks.

Even more perplexing is what has become Tazz' on-again, off-again announcing gig. How can the WWF expect him to improve, or even catch on with fans for that matter, if it keeps yanking him around?

Call me paranoid, but it seems the WWF is sending Tazz the same message it sent to countless wrestlers in the past. And the message is this: The WWF is not WCW or ECW. Regardless of what you've done in the past, you don't have power here. You'll do what you're told—and you'll like it—or you'll get buried.

The way I (along with a growing number of members of the wrestling media) see it, Tazz, at this point, has no options but to look at himself as a versatile team player who's still paying his dues and must still keep his mouth shut. But I can only wonder how much time has to pass before the thug starts feeling like just another victim of the WWF's dictatorship. □

the insider

(Continued from page 20)

to the fans and even some of the wrestlers. I found that I was genuinely enjoying a wrestling show for the first time in months.

The next day, I travelled to the HWA TV taping at Ohio Valley Wrestling's Danny Davis Arena. It was my first time at the OVW facility, and to a casual observer, it might not look like more than a ring, precious few chairs, and black walls, but to me, it was an inviting place. The warm reception I got from Jim Cornette and Danny Davis made me feel right at home. They gave me whatever I needed to do my photography work that night. Even though I watched the whole card through a camera lens, I enjoyed another fantastic show.

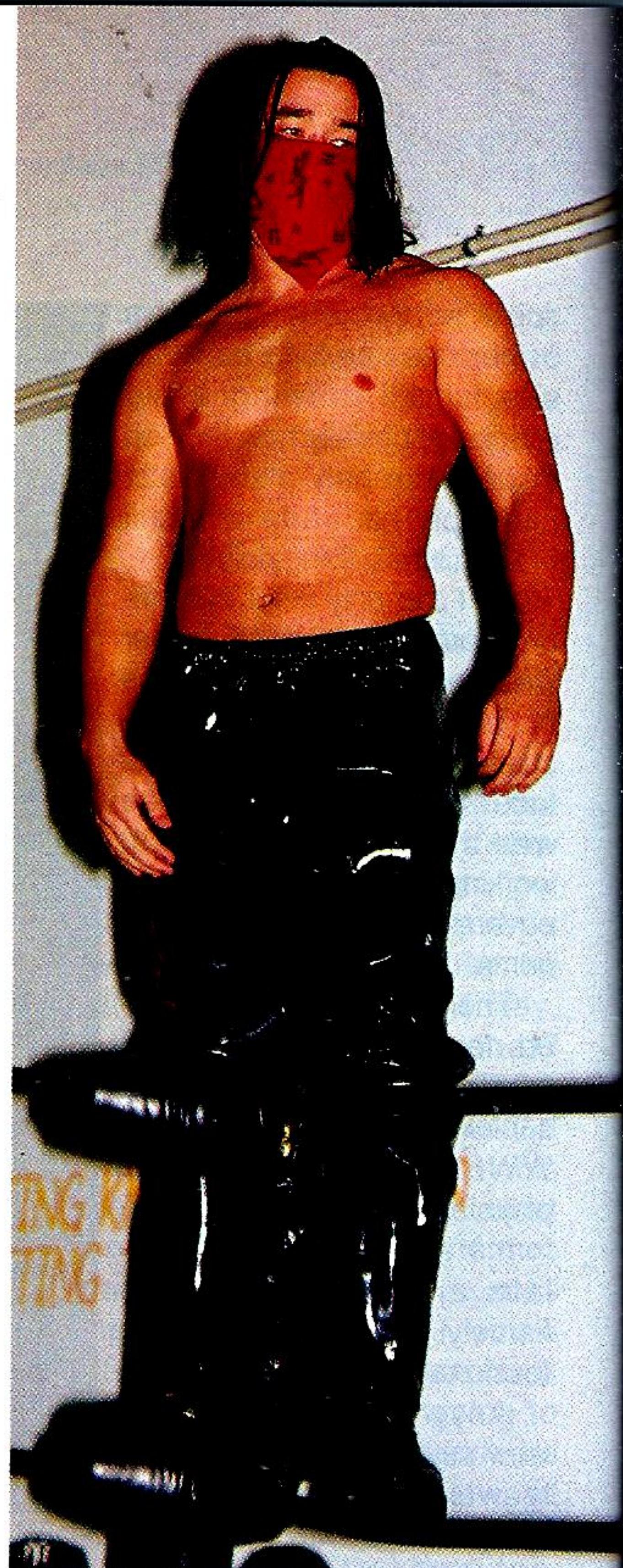
By day three of what was supposed to be my vacation, I finally realized why I felt so comfortable with my surroundings when I had never visited the HWA before: I was among kindred spirits. At the offices of INSIDE WRES-

TLING, the atmosphere is one of controlled chaos. Nary a day passes without some sort of crisis in wrestling, publishing, or otherwise. At Heartland Wrestling, it seems to be pretty much the same thing, just under a different set of circumstances.

Having the chance to trade war stories with Thatcher and Cornette made me realize why we all do what we do. We love this sport. Well, we all love professional wrestling, not necessarily this stuff called sports entertainment. Our love for the sport is that singular force that draws each of us back toward the ring even when we most don't want to be near it. It's that intangible energy that makes us fans in the first place. It's what makes old-timers sit around and tell their tales filled with emotion. It's what makes kids strive to almost kill themselves in their backyards while emulating their favorite wrestlers from TV. It's what keeps everyone from the Internet wannabe insider to Dave Meltzer reporting even the most unfounded of rumors just because there might be some truth to it someday. It is what truly makes us all marks, in varying senses of the word.

Love for the sport is why there are a bunch of WWF developmental wrestlers pushing themselves to the limit every day in Cincinnati. These kids spend every waking moment immersed in wrestling. Some even do it in their sleep. It's on their minds in casual conversation as well. I don't think I talked with one wrestler there who didn't use wrestling jargon to explain something that had nothing to do with wrestling.

Okay, the only exception to that was Jimmy Yang, but then that might be due to his limited grasp of the English language. There is only so much one can learn from American TV shows. But he's just so charming that I think I actually adopted him by the end of the trip. Or at least I would rather send my coffee money to him than some snot-nosed



You remember Jimmy Yang, right? He's formerly one-third of The Jung Dragons in WCW. He's now honing his skills—both wrestling and speaking—in Cincinnati. It was interesting to meet him while I was there.

kid in some third world country.

When it came time to leave, I found it hard to pack my stuff—minus Jimmy Yang—into my Jeep. I wasn't wary of the nine-hour trip back to my home. I just plain didn't want to leave. For a workaholic like me, it was so wonderful to be surrounded by determined, positive people who are all striving to be the best at their chosen craft. I enjoyed watching them deal with their version of chaos. I gained a new level of respect for them all, including their trainers. The Heartland Wrestling Association reawakened my senses and reaffirmed my belief that wrestling has a bright future. □

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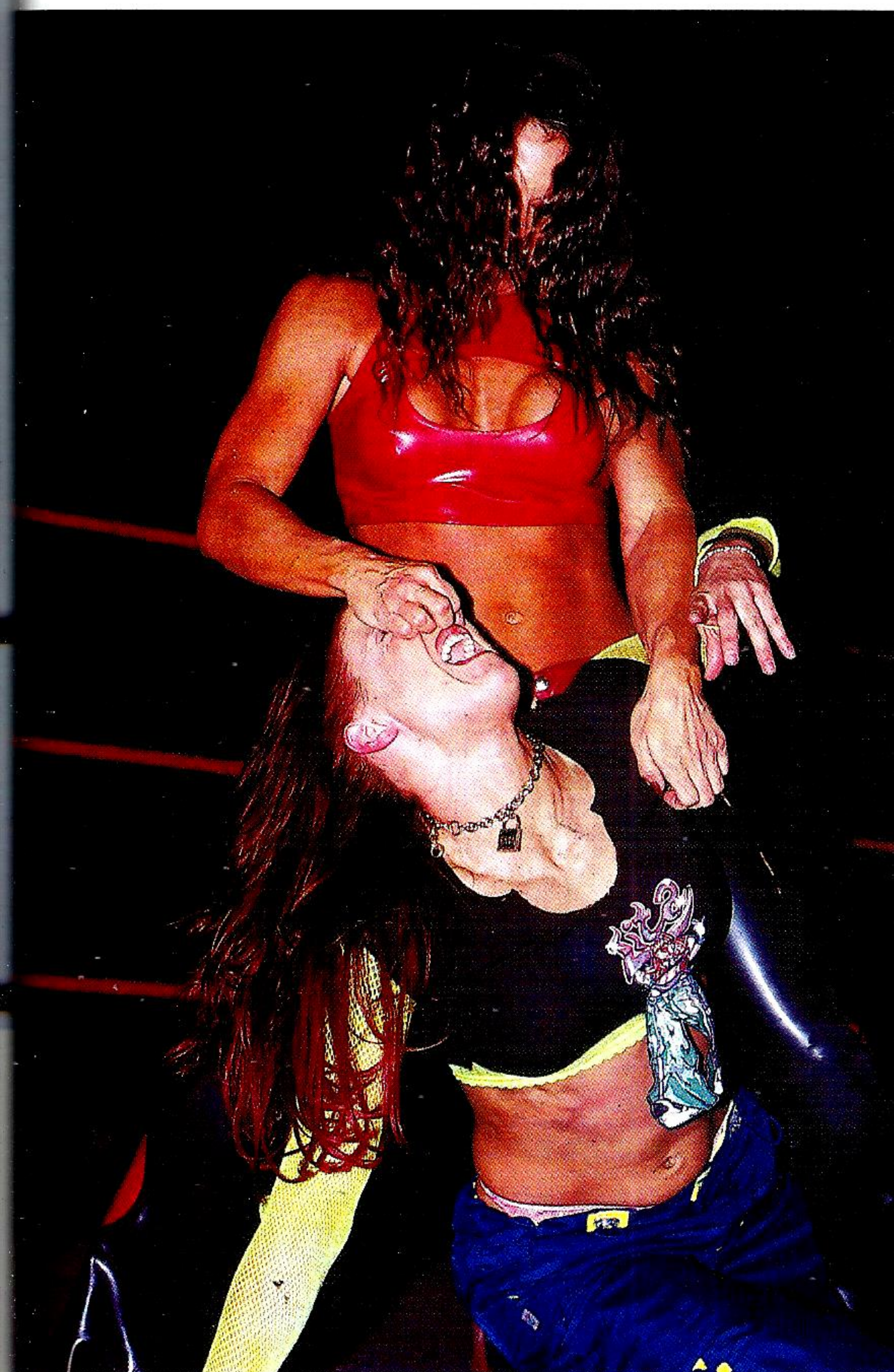
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Ivory and Lita have had a nice little rivalry in the WWF in the last few years, but have they done much to help build a strong women's division? No way, according to Liz, who wishes the WWF would do something to legitimize female competition.

but it was also accepted behavior throughout society. I realize Torrie Wilson doesn't earn as much money as Steve Austin. In the 1950s, she wouldn't have earned as much as Essa Rios.

I thought Chyna would change this trend. Chyna possessed the physical attributes and gritty determination to change women's wrestling. She became the first female

Intercontinental champion and a mainstream celebrity. But I suppose Chyna was considered a one-time wonder. Some would call her a freak of nature, and that might be true in the strict sense of the term. I prefer to call her a blessing of nature.

But Chyna went so far beyond women's wrestling that she rendered it worthless. As WWF women's champion, she couldn't find any decent competition. She ran through Ivory at WrestleMania X-Seven. She spanked Lita like a little girl. What does it say about the women's division when its top two contenders are trounced so thoroughly? After Chyna spanked and humiliated everyone in the division, she became caught in a contract dispute with the WWF and left the company.

That would be like Tiger Woods humbling every golf player on a routine basis and walking away from the sport. Michael Jordan did that to basketball, and the NBA has yet to recover. Even today's Jordan cannot equal his past legend and restore the league to its former glory.

Chyna left the WWF as the women's champion. The sad fact is that few fans noticed the women's championship wasn't around anymore. There was no pressure for announcers to address the title's status on television.

Finally, the WWF held a six-woman competition for the vacant championship at Survivor Series '01. No one mentioned why the title was vacant or the circumstances of Chyna's departure. With all of the boobs bobbing up the ring steps, no one cared. The women's division has become nothing more than an implant showcase.

I hoped the entry of former ECW star Jazz into the competition signaled a restoration of true talent to the women's title. Instead, the victory went to Trish Stratus, best known for her spanking matches with Stephanie McMahon-Helmsley and speaking "doggese" on all fours. I regard Stratus as a spectacular "diva," but not a women's champion. Please, WWF, restore some dignity to the women's championship.

Chyna's complete domination of the women's division turned it into a joke. It's too bad her contract dispute occurred before a Chyna-Jazz showdown could happen. For Chyna, the slight chance of becoming a Hollywood star proved more alluring than guaranteed success as a wrestling star. As a friend and confidante, I miss her. As a supporter of women's wrestling, I think she did more harm than good. □

official ratings

TOP 15

- 1—**THE ROCK**
(2) WCW World champion
- 2—**STEVE AUSTIN**
(4) WWF World champion
- 3—**KEIJI MUTO**
(3) All-Japan Triple Crown champion

- 4—**CHRIS JERICO**
(13) No. 1 contender: WCW World title
- 5—**KURT ANGLE**
(1) No. 2 contender: WWF World title
- 6—**JUN AKIYAMA**
(8) GHC heavyweight champion
- 7—**EDGE**
(10) WWF Intercontinental champion

- 8—**KAZUYUKI FUJITA**
(11) IWGP heavyweight champion
- 9—**THE UNDERTAKER**
(-) No. 3 contender: WWF World title
- 10—**ROB VAN DAM**
(5) WWF hardcore champion
- 11—**LEVIATHAN**
(-) OVW heavyweight champion

- 12—**TEST**
(-) No. 2 contender: WCW World title
- 13—**CHRISTIAN**
(6) WWF European champion
- 14—**SHINYA HASHIMOTO**
(-) No. 1 contender: NWA heavyweight title
- 15—**E.Z. MONEY**
(-) HWA heavyweight champion

WWF

- 1—**STEVE AUSTIN**
(3) 252, Victoria, TX
- 2—**THE ROCK**
(-) 272, Miami, FL
- 3—**EDGE**
(6) 240, Toronto, Ontario

- 4—**CHRIS JERICO**
(8) 225, Winnipeg, Manitoba
- 5—**KURT ANGLE**
(1) 233, Pittsburgh, PA
- 6—**THE UNDERTAKER**
(9) 304, Dallas, TX
- 7—**ROB VAN DAM**
(4) 237, Battle Creek, MI

- 8—**TEST**
(-) 282, Toronto, Ontario
- 9—**CHRISTIAN**
(2) 225, Toronto, Ontario
- 10—**WILLIAM REGAL**
(-) 257, Blackpool, England
- 11—**THE BIG SHOW**
(-) 472, Aiken, SC

- 12—**KANE**
(14) 345, parts unknown
- 13—**TAJIRI**
(7) 213, Tokyo, Japan
- 14—**SPIKE DUDLEY**
(-) 155, Providence, RI
- 15—**BRADSHAW**
(11) 309, Roscoe, TX

OVW

- 1—**LEVIATHAN**
(-) 325, parts unknown
- 2—**THE MACHINE**
(-) 241, Louisville, KY
- 3—**MARK HENRY**
(-) 344, Austin, TX

- 4—**NICK DINSMORE**
(-) 226, Jefferson, IN
- 5—**FLASH**
(-) 225, Detroit, MI
- 6—**PROTOTYPE**
(-) 260, Los Angeles, CA
- 7—**RANDY ORTON**
(-) 265, St. Louis, MO

- 8—**BULL BUCHANAN**
(-) 325, Marietta, GA
- 9—**MARK JINDRAK**
(-) 253, Auburn, NY
- 10—**BROCK LESNAR**
(-) 295, Minneapolis, MN
- 11—**SHELTON BENJAMIN**
(-) 245, Minneapolis, MN

- 12—**DAVID FLAIR**
(-) 205, Minneapolis, MN
- 13—**SEAN O'HAIRE**
(-) 270, Hilton Head, SC
- 14—**RON WATERMAN**
(-) 275, Greeley, CO
- 15—**DAMAJA**
(-) 240, Seymour, IN

JAPAN

- 1—**KEIJI MUTO**
(1) 245, Yamanashi, Japan
- 2—**JUN AKIYAMA**
(2) 225, Hiroshima, Japan
- 3—**KAZUYUKI FUJITA**
(3) 253, Funabashi, Japan

- 4—**VADER**
(8) 450, Denver, CO
- 5—**GENICHIRO TENRYU**
(4) 235, Tokyo, Japan
- 6—**KENSUKE SASAKI**
(-) 251, Tokyo, Japan
- 7—**KINTARO KANEMURA**
(11) 270, Tsu, Japan

- 8—**TOSHIAKI KAWADA**
(6) 245, Ashikaga, Japan
- 9—**MITSU HARU MISAWA**
(5) 228, Ashikaga, Japan
- 10—**GREAT SASUKE**
(13) 212, Tokyo, Japan
- 11—**TAIYO KEA**
(9) 235, Honolulu, HI

- 12—**MASA CHONO**
(10) 235, Tokyo, Japan
- 13—**KAMIKAZE**
(-) 272, Ashikaga, Japan
- 14—**KODO FUYUKI**
(-) 258, Yokohama, Japan
- 15—**YUJI NAGATA**
(7) 228, Tokyo, Japan

MEXICO

- 1—**LATIN LOVER**
(4) 190, Monterrey, Mexico
- 2—**EL HIJO DEL SANTO**
(1) 180, Tulancingo, Mexico
- 3—**PERRO AGUAYO JR.**
(2) 165, Zacatecas, Mexico

- 4—**REY MISTERIO JR.**
(-) 140, San Diego, CA
- 5—**NEGRO CASAS**
(12) 175, Mexico City, Mexico
- 6—**ULTIMO GUERRERO**
(13) 173, Mexico City, Mexico
- 7—**UNIVERSO DOS MIL**
(3) 240, Mexico City, Mexico

- 8—**JUVENTUD GUERRERA**
(-) 165, Mexico City, Mexico
- 9—**VILLANO III**
(5) 220, Mexico City, Mexico
- 10—**HEAVY METAL**
(7) 180, Mexico City, Mexico
- 11—**HECTOR GARZA**
(11) 220, Monterrey, Mexico

- 12—**FUERZA GUERRERA**
(-) 175, Mexico City, Mexico
- 13—**EMILIO CHARLES JR.**
(14) 222, Mexico City, Mexico
- 14—**FELINO**
(-) 165, Mexico City, Mexico
- 15—**SHOCKER**
(-) 185, Guadalajara, Mexico

TOP 15 TAG TEAMS

- 1—**BUH BUH RAY & D-VON DUDLEY**
(1) WWF World tag team champions
- 2—**TAIYO KEA & KEIJI MUTO**
(-) All-Japan & IWGP International tag team champions
- 3—**BRADSHAW & FAAROOQ**
(7) No. 1 contenders: WWF World tag title
- 4—**JEFF & MATT HARDY**
(5) No. 2 contenders: WWF World tag title
- 5—**THE BIG SHOW & KANE**
(-) No. 3 contenders: WWF World tag title

- 6—**2 COLD SCORPIO & VADER**
(-) GHC tag team champions
- 7—**ALBERT & SCOTTY TOO HOTTY**
(-) No. 4 contenders: WWF World tag title
- 8—**TATSUMI FUJINAMI & OSAMU NISHIMURA**
(-) No. 1 contenders: All-Japan & IWGP tag titles
- 9—**BILLY GUNN & CHUCK PALUMBO**
(-) No. 5 contenders: WWF World tag title
- 10—**JUSTIN CREDIBLE & LANCE STORM**
(-) No. 6 contenders: WWF World tag title

- 11—**THE ISLAND BOYS**
(-) HWA tag team champions
- 12—**YUJI ANJO & GENICHIRO TENRYU**
(6) No. 2 contenders: All-Japan & IWGP tag titles
- 13—**TOMMY DREAMER & STEVEN RICHARDS**
(-) No. 7 contenders: WWF World tag title
- 14—**THE NEW HEAVENLY BODIES**
(15) NWA tag team champions
- 15—**HUGH MORRIS & DALLAS PAGE**
(-) No. 8 contenders: WWF World tag title

These ratings are compiled by the editors with the assistance of promoters, wrestlers, and reporters around the country, and are based on won-lost records for the past month, quality of opposition, and the inherent skill of each wrestler. The number in parentheses indicates a wrestler's position in that category last issue; (-) indicates that the wrestler was not rated in that category last issue ... Championships highlighted in bold on the "Roll Call Of Champions" have changed hands since our previous issue ... The information under the championship listing indicates the date that champion won the title, who the former champion was, and where the match took place.

For period ended December 1, 2001

ROLL CALL OF CHAMPIONS

ALL-JAPAN INTERNATIONAL TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: TAIYO KEA & KEIJI MUTO
(October 22, 2001; from Yoji Anjo & Genichiro Tenryu; Niigata, Japan)

ALL-JAPAN TRIPLE CROWN CHAMPION: KEIJI MUTO
(June 6, 2001; from Genichiro Tenryu; Tokyo, Japan)

ALL PRO WRESTLING UNIVERSAL CHAMPION: MIKE MODEST
(June 2, 2001; from Vic Capri; Pacifica, CA)

ALL PRO WRESTLING UNIVERSAL TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: SHANE & SHANNON BALLARD
(July 28, 2001; beat Boyce LeGrande & Mark Smith; Vallejo, CA)

BORDER CITY WRESTLING CAN-AM HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: TITLE VACANT
(Most recently held by Mikey Whipwreck)

BORDER CITY WRESTLING TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: TERRY TAYLOR & CYRUS
(October 10, 2001; from Tyson Dux & Jack Damage; Oldcastle, Ontario)

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: SCOOT ANDREWS
(May 5, 2001; beat Billy Fives in tournament final; Wilmington, DE)

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION MID-ATLANTIC CHAMPION: MOZART FONTAINE
(April 7, 2001; from Glen Osbourne; Wilmington, DE)

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: AMERICAN DRAGON & LOW-KI
(April 7, 2001; from Charlie & Russ Haas; Wilmington, DE)

HEARTLAND WRESTLING ASSOCIATION HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: E.Z. MONEY
(November 14, 2001; won tournament; Dayton, OH)

HEARTLAND WRESTLING ASSOCIATION TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: THE ISLAND BOYS
(November 14, 2001; From Evan Karagias & Shannon Moore; Dayton, OH)

IPW Hardcore WRESTLING HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: SCOOT ANDREWS
(April 23, 2001; from Mike Sullivan; St. Petersburg, FL)

IPW Hardcore WRESTLING TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: THE SHANE BROTHERS
(April 23, 2001; from Rod Steel & Mark Zout; St. Petersburg, FL)

IWGP HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: KAZUYUKI FUJITA
(April 9, 2001; from Scott Norton; Osaka, Japan)

IWGP INTERNATIONAL TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: TAIYO KEA & KEIJI MUTO
(October 28, 2001; from Tatsumi Fujinami & Osamu Nishimura; Fukuoka, Japan)

IWGP JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: KENDO KA SHIN
(October 8, 2001; from Masayuki Naruse; Tokyo, Japan)

MARYLAND CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING CRUISERWEIGHT CHAMPION: QENAN CREED
(May 10, 2001; from Gregory Martin; Paw Paw, WV)

MARYLAND CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: JERRY LAWLER
(November 2, 2001; from The Bruiser; Chestertown, MD)

MARYLAND CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: JOEY MATTHEWS & CHRISTIAN YORK
(November 3, 2001; from Earl the Pearl & Rich Myers; Chestertown, MD)

NATIONAL WRESTLING ALLIANCE HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: TITLE VACANT
(Most recently held by Steve Corino)

NWA SOUTHWEST TEXAS HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: HOTSTUFF HERNANDEZ
(August 17, 2001; from Kevin Northcutt; Refugio, TX)

NWA SOUTHWEST TEXAS TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: MIKE ANTHONY & AL JACKSON
(April 13, 2001; from Larry Green & Chris Young; North Richland Hills, TX)

PRO WRESTLING NOAH GLOBAL HONORED CROWN CHAMPION: JUN AKIYAMA
(July 27, 2001; from Mitsuharu Misawa; Tokyo, Japan)

PRO WRESTLING NOAH GLOBAL HONORED CROWN JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: TATSUTOSHI TAKAIWA
(October 19, 2001; from Yoshinobu Kanemaru; Yokohama, Japan)

PRO WRESTLING NOAH GLOBAL HONORED CROWN TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: 2 COLD SCORPIO & VADER
(October 19, 2001; beat Jun Akiyama & Akitoshi Saito in tournament final; Yokohama, Japan)

WCW CRUISERWEIGHT CHAMPION: TAJIRI
(October 22, 2001; from Billy Kidman; Kansas City, MO)

WCW WORLD CHAMPION: THE ROCK
(November 5, 2001; from Chris Jericho; Uniondale, NY)

WWF EUROPEAN CHAMPION: CHRISTIAN
(October 30, 2001; from Bradshaw; Cincinnati, OH)

WWF Hardcore CHAMPION: ROB VAN DAM
(September 10, 2001; from Kurt Angle; San Antonio, TX)

WWF INTERCONTINENTAL CHAMPION: EDGE
(November 18, 2001; from Test; Greensboro, NC)

WWF LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: X-PAC
(August 19, 2001; from Tajiri; San Jose, CA)

WWF WORLD CHAMPION: STEVE AUSTIN
(October 8, 2001; from Kurt Angle; Indianapolis, IN)

WWF WORLD TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: THE DUDLEY BOYZ
(November 18, 2001; from The Hardy Boyz; Greensboro, NC)

WORLD XTREME WRESTLING HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: HEADSHRINKER SAMU
(October 21, 2001; From Dylan Dean; Allentown, PA)

WORLD XTREME WRESTLING TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: ROB HARPER & GENE SNISKY
(October 13, 2001; From Neil & Bob; Hazleton, PA)